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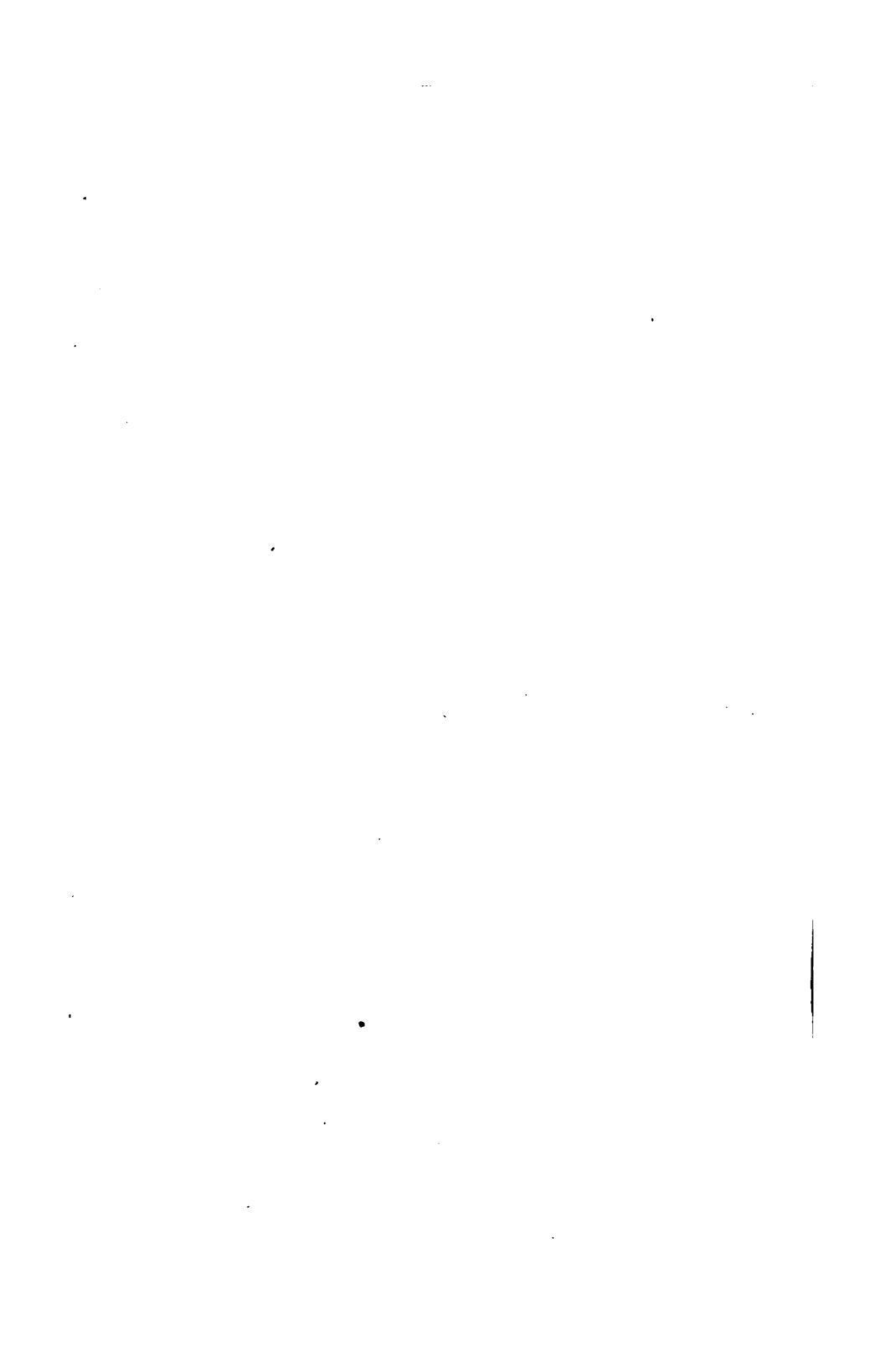




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LORD ULSWATER.

VOL. I.

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LONDON : PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET
AND CHARING CROSS.

LORD ULSWATER.

A Nobel.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "LORD LYNN'S WIFE,"
"LADY FLAVIA," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

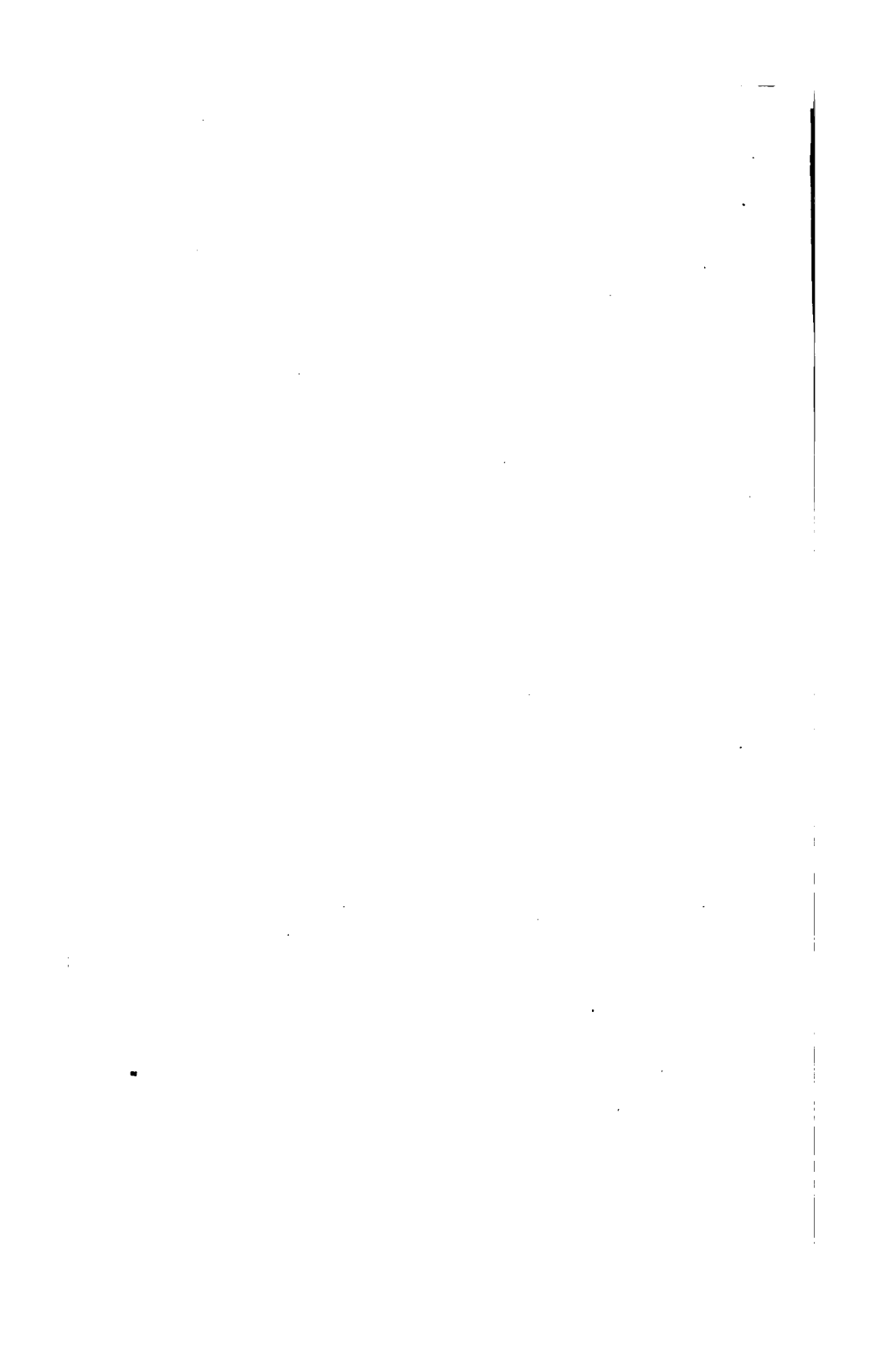
VOL. I.



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LORD ULSWATER.



CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST CLOUD.

MY LORD—I dare say you will not be overwell pleased to get a letter from me, for most-like your Lordship thought me dead (and glad enough to be rid of me), seeing I have not troubled you for years past. Nor would I now, but I am drove to do it. The old story, Mr. John. We are hard pushed for money, and must come on you for some more. Two hundred pounds would be worth a fortune to us just now; and if you send it to Mrs. Sark, under cover to Palmer Brothers, Government Quay, Perth, W. A., we shall be sure to get it all serene.

I tell you again, I am drove to do it, for James's sake. As for me, I'd sooner chop my

LORD ULSWATER.

VOL. I.

make some fight with the opinion of the press and of the public. The government wished to carry some point relating to ecclesiastical matters, and the Commons and the bulk of the newspapers backed the government. Two irritable bishops and a mild archbishop spoke on this question, for and against the bill, and one of the bishops spoke well. A marquis mumbled out a few words inaudible in the gallery; and two dukes asked questions, and seemed content with the answers they got; and there was a passage of arms between the Lord President of the Council and a testy Irish earl. Then the real battle began. There were statements and explanations on the part of government, sullen thunder from the great leader of Opposition, and much weaker thunder from the ministry; next a sharp stinging rejoinder, directed by the Chancellor against the bishops who had spoken irritably, and then it was that Lord Ulswater rose.

He rose, and all listened. It was known that he was able and eloquent, and he was in some sort looked upon as the future champion of his party. The great leader, Lord Tintagel, was growing old, and his thunder was hardly the

earth-shaking roar that it had once been. Orators are scarce among the hereditaries. There was a very good chance that if John, Lord Ulswater, would but stick to politics, he might rise one day to be the chief of his party ; and that was why men had collected to hear him speak, why the reporters were so busy with their pens, and why the galleries were crowded. There is always an interest in observing how a young race-horse of high promise takes his initiatory gallops across the turf of the downs. The Pall-Mall prophets wanted to see whether this clever young peer could be discreet as well as bitter ; whether he could parry and thrust, and hold his own with tough veterans. If so, he might look for prospective Garters and First Lordships of the Admiralty, perhaps for the Premiership itself. Hence their interest. As for the matter in debate, that was not much ; and Cicero himself could not have had any real influence on the division. The very dullest knew that. It was by the votes of absent peers that the struggle would virtually be decided. The Lord President was known to have many proxies in his pocket ; Lord Tintagel, many

more. When the proper moment came, they would pull these out, and conclude the battle by a process of arithmetic. But still it was to listen to the anticipated speech that the House had filled so well.

A very good speech it was, very good indeed to be spoken by so young a man, not long a legislator, and without the previous training of the stormy Lower House. Brilliant, but not boastful—tinged with scholarship, and yet not pedantic, it had the further merit of being sarcastic, and not spiteful. It was a good speech, not only for what it said, but for what it did not say, pungent, sparkling, sensible, modest—a speech that boded grander efforts and greater successes in the future. Perhaps the orator's personal gifts may have contributed to his success, for Lord Ulswater was of a goodly presence, tall and fair, and frank of eye and brow. He sat down amidst applause—such a murmur and buzz of approbation as could be expected from that cold assembly. Then men came to shake him by the hand, and give him their congratulations, more or less hearty, upon the success he had achieved.

The great chief did not stir from his seat, though he smiled and nodded blandly from a distance. The general in command of Her Majesty's Opposition could not reasonably be asked to pay greater honours than these to the most deserving subaltern. But Lord Tintagel's nods mean much, and already something of the aureola of prospective office was beginning, in the eyes of many, to encompass Lord Ulswater's handsome head.

With a flush of triumph on his brow, and a pleasant light in his dark-blue eyes, the hero of the moment was laughingly acknowledging the encouragement of his friends, when a letter was brought to him by one of the attendants of the House. Lord Ulswater was in the act of shaking hands with the more hot-tempered and energetic of the two prelates—the Lord Bishop of Slochester—on whose behalf he had broken a lance with the terrible Chancellor, when his eyes fell on this letter. A queer, squarely-folded document it was, sealed with red wax, scored and stamped with red ink, and marked with the words "Ship-letter." An uncouth, yet a self-asserting missive, written on thick blue paper,

and very carefully directed to the Right Hon. the Lord Ulswater, Park Lane, London, with the words "private" and "Most immediate" conspicuously penned upon the cover, and strongly underlined. It was on account of these written injunctions that his Lordship's secretary had started without delay for Westminster, and had sent in the letter to his employer without loss of time. The letter came from Western Australia, and the handwriting, though singularly bold, was a woman's.

He to whom the letter was addressed knew the writing well enough. He took the thick square-folded packet which the official had brought to him, and thrust it into his pocket with a quiet smile, continuing his conversation with those about him, as if the intrusive epistle had been of no consequence to him. But, somehow, the bloom of his triumph had been rudely brushed away, and the cup at his very lip had turned bitter. He cared no more for the praise of gray-headed old peers, or of fresh-complexioned young ones. Lord Tintagel's Olympian nods of approval had lost their zest. A chill fell upon the group that had gathered

around the hopeful neophyte of their party. Lord Ulswater kept his countenance very well, but his answers became dull and mechanical. What cared he, with that unread letter in his pocket, whether the Bishop of Slochester and his brother of Bullocksmithy did or did not predict great things of his future championship of the church. What was it to him if bluff barons growled expressions of good-will into his ear, or if boy-marquises exulted at his elbow, while that threatening thing, with its great red seal and uncouth folds, lay lurking in his breast, like a frozen snake waiting to be slowly thawed into life.

Gradually the group around the successful man broke up and dispersed; and then, not hurriedly, but slowly, and with a careless carriage of the head, the successful man himself sauntered away. One of the peers who are good enough to perform in their exalted sphere the duties of those gentlemen who are called "whips" in the Commons, came hastily forward, and took the deserter by the button.

"You're not going? We shall divide presently, you know," said the button-holder.

"I shall be in the library. I will be back in time to vote," said Lord Ulswater smiling; and he was released.

There would be no division for some half-hour or more, since the government had put up one of their prosiest supporters to speak, and that noble lord was doing his best to efface, by two columns of drear statistics and sleepy commonplace, the effect of the late discourse.

In the library, save for an attendant or two, and a deaf old lord in a brown wig, reading up poor-law facts in Hansard, the hope and pride of his side of the House found himself alone. He drew the letter from his pocket, and as he did so, for the first time the shadow of a great sorrow fell athwart his broad frank brow, and he looked haggard and ill. He was a bold man; no one had ever doubted that. His courage had been recognised, along with his other popular qualities, at Eton, at Christ-church, and in whatever position he had been placed, from boyhood upwards. But he held the square, ugly ship-letter in his hand for some little time, a minute or two minutes, before he broke the seal. Its contents, to him, were no great

mystery ; he had divined them at a glance, when he had seen and known the handwriting ; but still he hoped against hope.

He held the letter, unopened, for a little space, hesitating. Why not ? It is said that the bravest feel a thrill of something that is akin to fear when first they hearken to the roar, long expected, of the dread artillery. This letter, to Lord Ulswater's fancy, was as the opening gun of a battle that admitted of no truce, no flinching from the heat of the strife, no mercy to the vanquished—a grim, hard fight for life or death. A great gulf of ruin yawned suddenly before him, and he knew that he would need the help of all his energies, and of all his gifts of mind and body, to avoid the pitfall in his path—a pit, it may be, of his own digging, but so much the more dangerous in the present, perhaps the more fatal in the time to come.

Setting his teeth firmly, he tore the letter open, and read it once, twice, and then a third time. He was calm now, or at least composed, and although he knew himself to be virtually free from observation, he kept his features under firm control. There was no frown on his fair

forehead, no flash in his dark-blue eyes. But he could not prevent his lips from gradually growing white, or the eyes themselves from darkening in hue till they seemed nearly black, as, in excitement, they were apt to do, or the colour from fading out of his cheek. His lips never once trembled, however, and his attitude lost none of its easy grace as he re-read the writing for the last time.

Then he refolded the letter, carefully replaced it in his pocket, and taking up a book that lay on a table near him, fluttered over the leaves in an indifferent manner, reading, or seeming to read, scraps of its contents selected almost at random. While thus employed, the usual good-humoured smile came back to the face that had looked so deathly pale and stern but a few minutes back; the eyes regained their bright, untroubled look; and no observer would have guessed that John, Baron Ulswater, had a single care to weigh upon his breast, though never so lightly. Presently he went back, in time to give his vote; and when the result of the division was made known, the House hardly waited for the further formalities to adjourn. It broke up,

and its members went their way. It was high-tide just then in the London season, and Lord Ulswater was pledged to show himself in more than one great lady's crowded drawing-rooms. But those who had counted on him as on one of the minor lions of the time, reckoned without their truant guest. Lord Ulswater went to his own dwelling in Park Lane, and was seen no more that night.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCES MR. MOSS.

MR. MOSS, attorney-at-law, solicitor, and gentleman, as by act of parliament, had his place of business in the Old Jewry. The situation suited him, inasmuch as it was conveniently near to the central criminal court, where the bulk of his business lay, and to Her Majesty's prison of Newgate, where many of his clients were lodged. Mr. Moss may, or may not, have had any sentimental predilections for the precise locality in which he had pitched his professional tent; the Old Jewry has a suggestive sound, and there were those who averred that Mr. Moss was himself a Jew. If so, he was a Hebrew of a very modern pattern, being a smart little personage, dapper, and yet plump, as to his person; florid and tolerably well-

favoured as to his face. He had no greasy ringlets, no eagle beak, no unclean hands glittering with rings, no dubious jewellery displayed over a frayed waistcoat of satin. His hair was dark, certainly, but it was worn short, well-brushed, and exquisitely parted. His eyes were black as sloes, but many Anglo-Saxons have eyes of that colour. He was rosy, clean, and wholesome of visage; and it was only after some scrutiny that you could remark that the fleshy fulness of the lips, the thick nose, the narrow forehead, did lend some countenance to the tradition as to Mr. Moss's origin. Few of those who had dealings with him cared, however, whether he attended church or synagogue. He signed himself N. Moss; which initial prefix may have stood for Nathan, or Naboth, or Naphtali, no doubt, but would have answered equally well for Nicholas.

And St. Nicholas, patron, according to old legend, of thieves, would have been an extremely appropriate saint for Mr. Moss to be named after. The trim attorney had a well-merited reputation for being serviceable to clients in trouble. From Clerkenwell to the

Old Bailey, from Lambeth police-court to that of Thames Street, Mr. Moss was as well known to tipstaff and police as His Worship or My Lord Judge. The Middlesex magistrates were on terms of nodding acquaintanceship with this rogues' champion; and lord-mayors, bearing the sword of justice at Guildhall, soon learned to know the features of Mr. Moss as well as if he had been their own brother.

It was towards noon on the day following the debate on church matters in which Lord Ulswater had so greatly distinguished himself, that one of the clerks from the outer office brought in a card to Mr. Moss. The lawyer, who was making extracts from a book full of memoranda, and every now and then laying down the pen to resume what appeared to be the more interesting occupation of paring his pink finger-nails with a sharp little knife, could not repress a slight start of surprise as he took the card. It was Lord Ulswater's name that was engraved thereon, and it was not often that the peerage of England paid visits in the Old Jewry.

"Yes, I'm disengaged: show the gentleman in," said the lawyer, shutting up the pen-

knife with a snap ; and the clerk did as he was bid. Lord Ulswater, tall, fair-haired, and radiant with good looks and good-humour, seemed quite like a gleam of sunshine as he entered the dingy den where the attorney awaited him. The first words that passed between the two men proved that they were not strangers to each other.

“I am fortunate in finding you here, Mr. Moss. Remembering your many engagements, I hardly expected it,” said the visitor.

“Always happy to be of service to your Lordship. Pray, sit down, my Lord.—Chair, Aminadab.—Once a client, always a client, has been my rule through life,” replied the host ; and the clerk went out, and left his employer and the new-comer together.

“And what can I have the pleasure of doing for you now, my Lord ?” said the attorney after a pause, seeing that the other hesitated.

But Lord Ulswater did not immediately reply, but sat looking keenly at the lawyer, who also eyed his client with sharp but not hostile scrutiny. An incongruous pair of acquaintances ! It was not only in rank and in address that

there was a difference between them ; the contrast was more than skin deep. Had the two changed places, it would have been the same. Lord Ulswater was one of those few whom it seems as if fortune had no power to degrade. Had he been an artizan in a factory, a private soldier in the ranks, a labourer in the fields, he had that in his bearing and look which would have singled him out from the rest. There was much talk, once, about Nature's noblemen, and so far as the eye might judge, Lord Ulswater was clearly noble by Nature's letters-patent, as well as by the accident of birth. Unassuming, gracious without effort, kind to high and low, there seemed to be something chivalric about the man—something that made the eyes of men, and still more of women, follow him as he passed them by. It did not require a great stretch of imagination to fancy that Lord Ulswater, in time of need, might play a hero's part in the world.

Mr. Moss, though not ill-looking, had none of this brilliance. His face, when closely scanned, was seen to be shrewd, merry, courageous, and somewhat impudent. He affected a

sporting style in attire. His coat was always cut in what is known as a horsey mode ; he wore a white hat more commonly than a black one ; his blue neck-scarf was secured by a gold horse-shoe pin ; and of the bunch of charms that dangled from his heavy guard-chain, nearly all had some occult reference to the turf or the chase. But for his smart habiliments, Mr. Moss would have borne no trifling resemblance to a saucy London sparrow, knowing everything, and respecting nothing.

On the present occasion, he was, however, civil-spoken, and disposed to deference ; but he had probably reasons of his own for what he did. He was no blind idolater of the aristocracy. One man's money, so Mr. Moss thought, was as good as another man's, and he well knew the class that supplied his probable paymasters. But he was glad to see Lord Ulswater within his doors, and he had no desire to disgust his distinguished client by any flippancy of manner.

"You may probably remember, Mr. Moss," said the visitor, with a very slight hesitation, which the sharp attorney did not fail to note—"you may probably remember undertaking, at

my request, the defence of a person who was tried at the Old Bailey Sessions of 18—; a man named Sark—James Sark?”

“Quite well, my Lord. Recollect it as if the trial had been yesterday. Your Lordship—Mr. Carnac then—very liberally paid all costs and expenses, having an interest in the prisoner—ahem!” answered the lawyer, eyeing Lord Ulswater in a stealthy way, but stopping abruptly in his speech as he saw the gradual hardening of the noble face on which his gaze was riveted. Lord Ulswater’s anger, rarely evoked, manifested itself in an unusual fashion: there was no frown and no flash, but the blue eyes contracted, darkening well-nigh to blackness; and the fair face became cold, and colourless, and stern, like the marble mask of a statue. Those who had seen that change come over the lineaments of John Carnac, in boyhood or in manhood, had seldom felt comfortable in confronting those signs of the calm deep wrath that scorned to show itself by the tokens of vulgar rage. The attorney had seen that look upon his guest’s countenance before, and he was not slow to take the warning it conveyed.

"No offence, my Lord," he said in a deprecatory tone; "I did my best to carry out your wishes. They obtained a conviction, as it turned out, and my client, as an old hand, got fourteen years of it." Mr. Moss was quite serious now. There was that in Lord Ulswater's manner which chilled undue familiarity.

The visitor paused for a moment, and then, in a measured tone of conscious strength, rejoined: "I *did* take an interest in the man Sark, but not for the man's own sake. He was wholly a stranger to me. It was on his wife's account that I took the trouble to provide him with legal assistance. She was much attached to him, and her distress touched me. It was an unfortunate circumstance, no doubt, that a young woman, so respectably educated as she was, should have married such a desperado. He was, you remember, found guilty."

"Found guilty; just so. I cannot bring off all my clients, you know, my Lord," said Mr. Moss smirkingly.

"No; but you do not sell all your clients, I presume, as you sold Sark?" returned Lord Ulswater, looking the attorney full in the face.

The effect of this question upon the Old Jewry solicitor was ghastly in its abruptness ; the rosy little man became haggard and sallow in a moment, and he peered fearfully around the room, as if he thought some lurking eaves-dropper might be hiding behind the grimy window-curtains. Then he rose, stole on tiptoe to the door, softly grasped the handle, and flung the door open with a jerk. No key-hole listener was there. He reclosed the door, and wiped his forehead, damp with the dews of fear. " By Heaven, my Lord !" he whispered huskily, " I think you want me to be murdered. How did I know but one of those imps, Aminadab and the rest, might be listening ? And once let the word spread in certain quarters that shall be nameless, that I ever did—what you said I did —and ——" Mr. Moss did not finish the sentence in words, but he drew his open hand twice across his neck, immediately beneath the chin, thus imitating, in ingenious pantomime, the cutting of a throat.

Lord Ulswater eyed him with much composure, as a naturalist might watch the wriggling of some ugly little reptile. " So I should sup-

pose," was his cold reply. "Your customers are not free from vulgar prejudices, and they would be apt to resent the absence of honour among thieves—and thieves' lawyers.—Perhaps you will do me the favour to sit down again. And now, Mr. Moss, you will oblige me by listening to what I have to say, without interruptions which waste time. The facts of the case are briefly these. The woman, Sark's wife, being too poor to secure attorney and counsel for the defence of her husband, applied to me for assistance; I engaged your valuable services. It appeared to me, on hearing how strong was the evidence against the prisoner, and how bad and desperate was his character, that it would be a pity if, through some flaw or quibble of law, such a man as he were to be set free to pursue his career of warfare with society. Transportation, I thought, was his best chance, and a new life in Australia afforded him the only hope of mending his ways. You agreed with me in those views."

Here Mr. Moss winced painfully, but Lord Ulswater's falcon glance was upon him, and he did not venture on an outspoken protest.

“And, in short, matters were so managed that Sark received a sentence of transportation, and was presently shipped off to a penal settlement, where his wife, through my help, rejoined him. The convict behaved well, earned his conditional liberty; and he and his wife, with such slender pecuniary assistance as I, being then a younger son, could give, set up in some small way of business, and, for a time, did reasonably well. I fear that they have had misfortunes, or that the man has relapsed into his old evil ways, which I should regret, I am sure. I wish them both well. I should be heartily glad to hear that they were happy and prosperous—in Australia.” Lord Ulswater laid very great emphasis on these last two words, and the puzzled expression that had clouded the lawyer’s face cleared off as by magic. He arched his eyebrows, and screwed up his mouth, as if in the act of indulging in a prolonged though silent whistle. “Whew! that’s it, is it? I see. In Australia. Exactly so. Much better there than here. A pity, a sad pity, that Mr. and Mrs. Sark should break bounds, and come back to England, with all its temptations

—a very great pity indeed,” said Mr. Moss, with twinkling eyes.

“It would, as you say, be a pity. But it is not unlikely, I fear, to come about, since Sark is again in trouble, and evidently restless,” said Lord Ulswater.

“May I ask if your Lordship is sure of this?” inquired Mr. Moss, with so well-feigned an air of doubt, that it threw his companion for an instant off his guard.

“Sure of it? Loys herself wrote me word,” he began, and then stopped short, regretting the incautious utterance that was already beyond recall. He looked hard at the lawyer, suspecting, and not without reason, that he had been trapped into a hasty admission; but the face of Mr. Moss wore its most innocent expression.

“Those old lags,” said the attorney thoughtfully—“I say old, because Sark had been transported before—get a home-longing upon them sometimes, in the colonial townships, in the bush, or where not, that’s like nothing so much as the fierce desire for water of a man perishing from thirst. It draws them back to the old country, although they know how much

better their chance is on the other side of the herring-pond. But they will do it, and I don't see how we are to prevent it. It's not a hanging matter now, to be a runaway transport."

This time, the lawyer spoke in all sincerity, and, by some subtle instinct of perception, which we all possess in a greater or less degree, Lord Ulswater felt that it was so. His own voice was earnest and almost eager as he made answer: "Let us understand each other, Mr. Moss. I have come here to ask you to give me your help, so far, and no further than you safely can. To you, this man's return, should any untoward accident reveal to him the part you played at his trial, is a serious risk; while to me I admit that it would be an annoyance. I wish to prevent him from carrying out any rash project that he may have formed; but, first, I must have clear and reliable information. Am I mistaken in believing that you have ways and means of procuring very recent and very accurate tidings of what goes on in Western Australia? You understand me?"

"I—I think I do," said Mr. Moss reluctantly. "I could find out something, if I had a couple

of days to make inquiries, and I could then communicate——”

But here Lord Ulswater laid his hand lightly on the lawyer's sleeve. “Plain-speaking is best, Mr. Moss,” said he; “news at second-hand is not always worth the buying. I prefer going in person to the fountain-head for information. Introduce me to the oracle; let me hear with my own ears such intelligence as is to be had, and do not doubt that the service will be a well-paid one.”

Mr. Moss made wry faces at this proposal, and dropped more than one obscure hint as to the probable peril, if Lord Ulswater should venture on personally exploring the remote eastern regions which the attorney indicated by a jerk of his thumb. But these warnings being received with a smile of quiet contempt, and the stubborn purpose of his high-born client remaining unshaken, Mr. Moss succumbed, and agreed to an appointment, at dusk, on the third day following. There were preparations to be made, he remarked, and preliminary inquiries, entailing trouble and expense. Lord Ulswater had probably anticipated this broad hint, for he drew a

rustling piece of crisp bank-paper from his pocket-book, and placed it in the solicitor's ready hand ; then he rose.

"I shall be punctual," said Lord Ulswater, as he turned to leave the room.

"And so shall I," said Mr. Moss, bustling forward to bow the visitor out—"unless your Lordship thinks better of it, and drops me a line to say so. We shall have to go to queer places, and among queer lots, I can assure you. Good-morning, my Lord.—The arrangement holds, then?" whispered Mr. Moss on the door-step. Lord Ulswater merely smiled, but the smile was more expressive than words—the quiet, self-conscious smile of a man who was not to be turned from his purpose by idle fears or glib persuasion. The attorney stood watching the tall form of his client until it became lost in the stream of passengers, and then, shaking his head airily, as a bird might have done, he went slowly back into the stronghold of his office.

CHAPTER III.

ST. PAGANS.

It was a wild night. The sea moaned as if in pain, heaving with a dull sound against the cliff-foot. The wind howled shrilly, and the white-winged sea-mews, harbingers of the threatening storm, screamed out their harsh complaining cry as they flew inland. The sun had not long gone down, but the summer sky was black with driving clouds, and the mist floated, dim and vaporous, over the bare bleak downs.

St. Pagans Abbey, built of gray stone, and standing lonely on the verge of the cliff, was hardly to be distinguished from the surrounding objects of that rugged coast-line. Huge, dark, and melancholy, the old house stood like a sentinel mounting guard upon the frontier-line between land and sea. Its long façade would

have been in complete darkness, but that the mingled light of fire and candle streamed from two of the windows on the ground-floor, looking seaward. And there was something sad in the very glow and redness of that unseasonable fire-light, which told, as fires burning in the sweet summer-time are apt to tell, of illness and of suffering.

All the rest of the great pile, what with mist and what with the murky twilight, was in deep shadow. Through gathering blackness, the keenest eye might have strained in vain to see such beauties as the place possessed—the broken shafts and shattered oriel of the Lady Chapel, the elaborate carving of the stone groins and mullions, or even the noble porch, over which still stood the weather-stained effigy of St. Paganus himself, with episcopal staff and mitre, while beneath the saint's sandalled feet the Carnac coat of arms was deeply cut in the hard Caen stone; for the abbey and its broad lands had been a gift from King Henry VIII. to Sir Ranulph Carnac, and still belonged to the descendants of that fortunate knight. County histories and books of reference re-

corded St. Pagans as the principal seat of Lord Ulswater.

A grand old house it was, but not a cheerful one. Something of the gloom and unwholesome stagnation of its former occupants clung to the place yet, and threw a shadow over the lives that were spent there. There were long passages, paved with stone or floored with oak; narrow stairs that wound tortuously up to square turrets overlooking the dull gray sea or the dull green downs; there were vast and lofty rooms, contrasting with cells into which modern philanthropy would not permit a felon to be thrust; and the very panels were of dark wood, that seemed to swallow up the sunlight on the brightest day in June. It was a house in which there lurked scores of unsuspected echoes, ready to burst forth and repeat, with ghostly hollowness, the clapping of a door, the shriek of the wind, or a heavy footfall on the flooring that covered crypts as extensive as the chambers above ground.

No wonder that the abbey had the ill name that adheres to many an ancient mansion, and was believed by the ignorant to be haunted and

accursed. The old ecclesiastical owners, it was whispered in cottage and farmstead for leagues around, would not quite forsake the place whence the king had driven them forth. Strange noises were heard at night—so the legend ran. The pale gleam of tapers lighted by no earthly hands was sometimes seen to glimmer amid the ruins of the chapel, and the faint sound of music and of chanting was heard to float upon the midnight air. There was talk, too, of a spectral Monk that was seen, now and again, to glide with noiseless tread through the long passages that led from the refectory and the guest-chamber to what had been the abbot's house. Some were yet living who were obstinate in their assertion that they, warned by a creeping terror that came suddenly upon them when traversing the corridors alone, had looked round, and had seen that tall form, robed in its black Benedictine garb, with cowl drawn down, and girdle of cord, pass them by, stately and silent, ay, pass them by so near that the coarse robe of serge well-nigh touched them ; yet there was no sound, nothing but a chill, as if an ice-cold blast of wind has swept past. High wages were not

always temptation enough to keep servants beneath the roof-tree of St. Pagans Abbey; and indeed the present possessor, though for other than superstitious motives, kept aloof from the place.

The room whence the firelight threw its flickering gleam into the increasing darkness without, was the smallest of the spacious suite of saloons that fronted the sea—the smallest, but the one that had preserved the most thoroughly such features of its old design as might serve to conjure up pictures of the long-buried Past. It was called the Tapestry Room. The walls were hung with arras, admirably preserved, and of which the colours had faded but little since patient eyes and deft fingers had finished their toil upon that gigantic task of needlework. These hangings represented some scriptural subject; and though the Jewish champions wore the armour of the fifteenth century, and the ladies were in the court-costume of Queen Margaret's day, the groups were boldly sketched, and the details wrought out with painful care. The ceiling was of black oak, polished like a mirror, and so was the floor, as far as the soft

carpet permitted a margin of the shining wood to be visible. The furniture was imitated from the antique, with such concessions to modern ideas of comfort as were necessary to nineteenth-century inmates. There was a sort of alcove at one end of the chamber, which had once served the abbot as a private oratory, though the rich crucifix had long since been torn down by rude hands.

The two occupants of the room afforded a marked contrast to each other. The elder was a tall, gray-haired woman, gaunt and hard-featured, with high cheek-bones, and forehead deeply furrowed. She looked so stern and so strong in her cold pride, that it was not until the firm mouth softened into a smile that her true nature revealed itself. And yet Lady Harriet Ashe, aunt to the late lord, as well as to the present holder of the family honours, was a thoroughly good woman, gentler in deeds than in looks. Herself an old maid, with no ties but those of consanguinity, she had devoted her life to the sickly boy, her dead sister's son, who had last worn the Ulswater coronet; had nursed him and cared for him, and studied his whims, and

been his best friend. Reginald Carnac, brother of the present lord, had owed it to his aunt's care that he ever grew up to be a man, to take his place among his peers, to marry, and to hail the birth of a son who might inherit after him. Then the black cloud of misfortune had closed around his manhood more darkly yet. Wifeless and childless, the late lord had been glad to die ; and the kind old hand that had smoothed his pillow so often in his infancy, had had the task of closing his eyes for their last sleep.

But Lady Harriet did not leave St. Pagans. The new owner, John, Lord Ulswater, was unmarried, and he rarely visited the great country-house where his ancestors had dispensed hospitality, so that Lady Harriet was still *de facto* mistress of the abbey. The other occupant of the room was a girl, whose face, in spite of its wax-like pallor, was loveliness itself, but a loveliness which saddened the gazer. The blue eyes were too large and too wistful, the thin cheek too transparent in its delicacy, and there was too much that was eager, too much that was thoughtful, in the expression of the whole countenance, for its looks to have been consistent with healthy,

joyous youth. Even in her attitude, the guest offered a forcible contrast to her hostess : whereas Lady Harriet, with old-fashioned rigidity, sat stiffly upright in her chair, as if her sixty-five years weighed lightly upon her, the visitor reclined upon a couch, and was propped up with soft cushions. A second glance told the cause of this. Ruth Morgan, with the face of an angel, was a hopeless invalid from her childhood up ; a poor crippled thing, whose curved spine made her a sufferer for life. There was something anomalous in this girl's whole condition. She had rare beauty and considerable talents, but her infirmity shut her out from all the ordinary hopes of womankind. The daughter and the sister of two of the richest commoners in England, she was yet poor, and almost dependent on her brother ; and although she was on terms of friendship and habitual intercourse with women of Lady Harriet's rank, she had no pretensions to high social standing. Her father, the architect, as the phrase runs, of his own fortune, had begun life with no other capital than his own strong arm and shrewd brains ; he had died a millionaire, and had left his son a very wealthy man.

There was some sunshine in Ruth's dreary life, after all. Every one somehow grew to be fond of her. The hardest natures relented towards this sad and pretty girl, to whom the crowning glory of womanhood was for ever denied. There was something in the sweet pale face, something in those great sad eyes, that softened the hearts of even the worldliest, for it was plain that Ruth's earthly pilgrimage would not be a long one. She was, as it were, marked for an early grave, and all the care of those who loved her could but delay the stroke for a little while. Those London physicians whose fame was highest, and whose fees were heaviest, had of late agreed in ordering the patient to the seaside, and Lady Harriet had invited her to spend the early summer at St. Pagans. It was better, she said, than a Brighton lodging or a villa at Ventnor, and she—Lady Harriet Ashe—would be the happier for having some one to nurse. There those two, guest and hostess, the proud patrician old maid and the dying girl, sat together in the Tapestry Room, with the curtains drawn back, and the warm red firelight flickering forth into the murky darkness without.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHADOW OF THE PAST.

"It was a night like this," said Lady Harriet, looking steadily at the fire that burned upon the hearth, as if she saw a vision of the past pictured in the ruddy embers lying, like glowing carbuncles, around the crackling logs. Any other than a wood-fire would have been an anachronism in that room, where the tapestry shook upon the walls as the wind forced its devious way through the ghostly galleries and passages of the old house. A log-fire it was, and the heavy andirons of parcel-gilt brass had once, as likely as not, been the abbot's own. "A night like this—I remember it so well!" she continued, in a low tone, like that of one who thinks aloud.

"Then it was not sudden? It did not happen unexpectedly, as I had always heard

it did?" asked Ruth, with an interest which her hostess instinctively felt to be no feigned one.

Lady Harriet turned towards the sofa. "Sudden, yes; unexpected, no," she made answer, in a voice that sank almost to a whisper, and then added: "The Monk had been seen by night once, twice, three times. Three times in three days. And then the lights in the chapel, and the music of the choir—I knew Evil was near. Ah, child, I should not say this to you; you will laugh at me, as a foolish, superstitious old woman."

"No, indeed no, dear Lady Harriet," replied the invalid earnestly: "I shall not laugh, believe me, at anything which you believe to concern the welfare of you and yours. I know you put faith in this tradition, but a haunted house has no terrors for me."

"Nor for me, or I should scarcely stay at St. Pagans," said Lady Harriet with one of her grim smiles; "yet there are times when I hardly know what to think; and, after all, the legend rests on no stronger evidence than the tattle of ignorant serving-men and maids. I never saw

anything, nor did any member of the family. No ; I am wrong—Reginald did.”

“Your nephew—the late lord ?” asked Ruth with a slight shudder, in spite of her professed incredulity.

“Yes,” answered Lady Harriet, as she sat, upright and rigid as a rock, with the firelight shining on her gray hair and furrowed brow—
“Yes ; it was the night before the child died. John was away in London ; Reginald lay here, on that very couch where you are lying now, dear ; for this was his favourite room, and the fire burned brightly on the hearth, just as it does now, though the day had been a warm one. I left Reginald asleep, as I thought, and went up to the nursery, where the sick child lay. Then I came down, and found Reginald awake, and his face quite gray and haggard. He had seen, he said, a figure in the long black robes of a friar, standing in the doorway, and shaking its uplifted hand, with a gesture of menace at him as he lay. He could not see the face, not even the eyes, for the shadow of the cowl. Then, as he rose, it was gone, silently and swiftly, but he knew that he had seen the Monk, the impalpable

enemy that haunts our dwelling, and heralds the grief to come. Next day, the child died."

"It was strange," said Ruth thoughtfully, glancing towards the doorway, across which there hung a heavy damask curtain, the massy folds of which presented some fanciful similarity to the monkish garb.

"It was," replied Lady Harriet, pushing back her chair from the circle of the firelight's gleam—"it *was* strange. Poor Reginald—he was ill, and in a morbid, anxious state of mind just then—I did my best to persuade him that what he had seen was but the creation of a disordered imagination. His hopes were all so wrapped up in that poor motherless child up-stairs—the heir of the Ulswater title and estates; and though there seemed no reason for apprehending that the boy would die, yet Reginald feared the worst; and the worst came.—Do I weary you?"

"No, no. Pray, tell me everything, if to do so does not give pain to yourself," said Ruth, in her gentle voice.

Thus encouraged, Lady Harriet resumed: 'You know how I loved Reginald. I promised

my dear sister on her death-bed that I would care for and cherish him, the sickly eldest son, as if he were my own ; and I faithfully kept my word. He was very dear to me, for his own sake and for Caroline's sake ; and when he married, I confess that I felt jealous and angry that there should be another woman to come between my boy and myself, good and sweet as Edith was. I knew Reginald's merits as no one else knew them. He was shy and haughty, and not popular, like his brother, for everybody praised John, who seemed like sunshine in a house, while Reginald was slow to make friends. And then—two months after the birth of an heir—Lady Ulswater died, and her death broke my nephew's heart. I never saw him smile again, poor lad, until the hour of his own ending drew near. He smiled then, on that evening on which he died, and said that he should see her—Edith—very soon. And so they all went from me—Edith, and Guy, and Reginald, and left me, my dear, a lonely, desolate old woman, useful no longer in the world.”

She broke down now, with a great sob in her voice, and turned her face towards the fire, as

if to hide her streaming eyes. She was a proud woman, and not prone to show her sorrow by tears, but now the emotions that had been called into activity by her narrative were too much for her high-bred stoicism. The sofa was so near, that its occupant was able to stretch out her own thin little hand, terribly transparent and white to look upon, with the pale blue veins marking its delicate surface, and to lay it caressingly on the wrinkled, ring-covered hand of Lady Harriet.

"It is all my fault," said Ruth; "I should not have asked——" Then she paused, hesitating, for the grief of the aged seldom fails to affect the young with a kind of awe.

But Lady Harriet's strong nerves soon triumphed over the anguish of the moment. She wiped away the tears with a sort of angry impatience, and her gaunt features were quite composed, and her deep voice more harsh than usual, as she turned towards her young friend and said: "You shall not see me so weak again. It is not often, dear, that I have so good a listener as you. Few come to see me here, and I do not care to tell my stupid old

stories to chattering women of the world or silly school-girls.—But I left my tale, such as it is, half told. It was a sad house we had of it, here at St. Pagans. Up-stairs, little Guy Carnac, the infant heir, lay ill; and here, in the Tapestry Room, his widowed father, my poor boy Reginald, passed his weary days stretched upon this sofa, sick in mind and body. The fits to which he had been subject from childhood, but which he had been wholly free from in later life, had been brought on once more by his passionate sorrow and despair when his young wife died. There he lay, wasted and worn to a shadow of his former self, and it seemed as if his frail thread of existence must snap at the first shock. What bound him to life was his great love for his boy, Edith's only child." Here the speaker's stern voice quivered somewhat, then went firmly on. "Reginald's nature was not demonstrative; he was shy and reserved—almost awkward. I doubt if Edith herself ever quite understood how much he loved her. When she was taken away, he had nothing left but this child on which to found a hope; and it was wonderful to see how he loved the little fellow, on whom it was

only too clear that the title and property must soon devolve ; for the doctors did not disguise the fact that Lord Ulswater was not long likely to be spared to us. And Guy was such a pretty child, a noble, frank-eyed boy, that any father might have been proud of. He was ill, as I have said, but it was a trifling illness, to all appearance, a slight attack, that caused no alarm to me, and which the physician from Shellton-on-Sea smiled at as he talked of a speedy and certain recovery. I was but such an illness as care and a good constitution enable thousands of children to surmount. Reginald alone was nervous and despondent about his infant son.—You are very fond of your brother, Ruth?”

A slight flush of colour came into the sick girl's death-pale face, and her voice trembled a little as she replied: “Yes, very, very fond. But why, dear Lady Harriet?”

“Because, child,” answered the old lady, kindly patting the little weak hand that still rested on hers, “because you will thus understand how very complete and absolute was Reginald's affection for his only son—as all of Edith that was left to him. He alone was

fearful respecting the child, and I could not persuade him, nor could his brother, that there was nothing to fear. How well do I remember, on just such a night as this, as I said before, with the wind shrieking outside the abbey as it shrieks now, and the same screaming of the sea-birds that shunned the gathering storm, and the same hollow roar of the great sea among the caverns of the cliff—on just such a night as this, John, now Lord Ulswater, came suddenly down from London. He was very kind and considerate to his brother, always, and would read to Reginald for hours, in his clear pleasant voice, or sit and watch him when he was at the worst of his illness, with a patience and a tenderness which I had thought no one but a woman could show. But John was a good brother—good in all things, I think—though I loved dear Reginald the best, perhaps because he wanted my love more than John did, for the younger of those two was the idol of rich and poor. I found John, whom we had not expected, in the Tapestry Room with Reginald, when I came down from seeing the sick child. It was the day after Reginald had seen the Monk, and that apparition,

real or fancied, had filled him with fears for the child. Yet there seemed no 'cause for fear. Dr. Dennis had but lately driven back to Shellton-on-Sea, assuring us that there was no reason for apprehension. His little patient, he said, was doing well. So I believed."

Lady Harriet looked for a moment at the window nearest her, past which the white wreaths of mist swept, hurrying on the wings of the wind like ghostly squadrons of charging horse; and she listened for an instant to the increasing roar of the surges below, before she went on, in a grave, quiet voice:

"The child had been restless, but he had fallen asleep at last, and there he lay slumbering, with one little arm under his head. The wan, tiny face had something piteous in its look, as it lay half hidden by the soft pillow, under the silk hangings of that great old-fashioned bed. The nursery at St. Pagans is a great gloomy room, not at all, to my thinking, what a nursery should be; and the woodwork over the child's head was carved and gilded to represent a coronet, with the Carnac motto in gold letters beneath. Poor pretty babe—he was never to

succeed to the honours that his ancestors had won. I remember feeling that there was something plaintive in the contrast between the little sufferer and all the cumbrous old-world splendour of the apartment which was called the King's Room, from a legend that Charles II. had once slept in it. The pillows were bordered with lace, and the counterpane was a wonderful piece of old needlework, in scarlet and white; and there were fine old pictures in dull gold frames on the panelled walls. There were the medicine vials and glasses on a table, and some hothouse fruit, untasted, and the toys that the poor child's little hands were never more to play with. A feeble light was burning. Everything was exquisitely neat and orderly, even to the dress of the nurse herself, who sat, with an open book before her, beside the shaded lamp.

"Have I mentioned this nurse before? No. She was quite a young woman, little more than a girl, and I could hardly believe at first that Mrs. Fletcher, at her age, could be married. Married she was, however, and her husband was abroad—a sailor or an emigrant, I forget which. She was of very respectable parentage, and

better taught than the majority of servants. John it was who recommended her, having known her father, I understood, and she proved a treasure of carefulness and steadiness during the short, short time in which her services were needed.

“Well, this Mrs. Fletcher, Emma Fletcher, from the north of England, was the nurse; and I recollect her face well as I saw it that night. A very remarkable face, my dear. I may as well own at once that I did not and could not like her, though I am sure my antipathy was but a foolish prejudice. She was very good-looking—dark and handsome, like a Spaniard or a Jewess, with hair as black as night, and a rich complexion, and great dark eyes, that looked as if they could flash with anger or scorn, though she was always quite respectful and well-behaved. The first time I ever saw Mrs. Fletcher, I was struck by an extraordinary resemblance between her face and some other face that I knew well, and the likeness puzzled me. Have you noticed, Ruth, the picture in the great dining-room, nearest the fireplace, that of Jael slaying Sisera? Because Jael’s fierce dark

young face, as she bends over the sleeper she is about to murder, is so very like the face of Guy's nurse, alike in its wild beauty and a sort of stealthy savagery, like that of a tigress stealing upon her prey. I have often thought since then of the curious resemblance.

"Mrs. Fletcher sat there, quiet and patient, and kept watch over the child. She had not been long at St. Pagans; but it was evident that she was growing attached to her little charge, a bright lovable boy, with a generous nature already beginning to look out of his sunny eyes. And the boy was fond of her. She was rather a silent young woman; and I heard from the other servants that she was very reserved with them, and very proud. She did not keep company with any member of the household here, but spent her whole time with the child; and the servants now and then found her weeping passionately, so they said, but she was not one to tell her sorrows. Most likely, she was anxious about her husband abroad. I left her up-stairs, that night, and I recollect that the likeness to the picture struck me more forcibly than usual as I caught the last glimpse of her dark eyes,

and the white teeth just visible between her red lips as she answered my last words.

“That night, the child died—died in his sleep. In the morning, Nurse Fletcher awoke, and found him dead and cold, poor pretty innocent! His ending was painless, but it was a dreadful blow to us all. On the day of the child’s funeral, Reginald was seized by the paralytic attack from which he never recovered, though he lingered on long, for months and years, between life and death, a living wreck. He died, and was buried beside his wife and son; and that is how John came to be the present Lord Ulswater.

CHAPTER V.

AMONG THIEVES.

"A QUEER start this!" muttered the driver of a London four-wheeled cab, as he stood chinking the money in his hand, and inquisitively eyeing the receding figures of his late passengers. "A nice place it is, surely!" he growled out, as, with a disappointed shake of the head, he gave up the effort to solve the hopeless problem, as to what business could take his late fares to such a quarter of the town. Then he climbed to his box, and drove off, not at the peculiar crawling pace which empty cabs effect, but at a brisk trot. There was little chance of custom in Great Popplewell Street.

For Great Popplewell Street is of evil repute—one of the noisiest, and poorest, and foulest of all the foul, poor, and noisy thoroughfares in the far east of London. In Great Popplewell

Street, midnight is as noonday elsewhere, the season for such dubious industry and life as the district affords. The swarming population of a hundred courts, and rents, and lanes, and stifling blind alleys, and other dens where unwholesome existence stagnates in utter misery and vice, emptied itself into Great Popplewell Street as brooks fall into a river. It was between ten and eleven o'clock, and the sultry summer's night was nowhere so oppressive as in that reeking thoroughfare and its tributaries. Heavy, and warm, and still, the air was laden with ill odours, and resonant with shrill cries, drunken howls, blasphemy, threats, and ribaldry. There was much quarrelling always in that neighbourhood, and not seldom fights, that swelled to the proportions of a riot, and so came to be chronicled in newspaper paragraphs, and thus a dispute more or less caused little wonder to the frequenters of the place.

The cabman's late fares, however, were by no means frequenters of the place, as even an inexperienced eye might have told at the first glance. They were too well dressed for that, and had not the gait or the bearing of the

regular denizens of such a locality. Yet they were as ill-assorted a pair as ever trod the London pavement in company. The more stalwart of the two, tall and upright as a life-guardsmen, seemed to listen with some impatience to the words which his associate uttered as they walked along. "Do, my Lord," whispered Mr. Moss disconsolately—"do button your coat, so as to hide that guard-chain. We shall have a row else. They can't resist the sight of gold, and it's really not fair to tempt them. It isn't indeed."

Lord Ulswater laughed at the little man's eagerness, but a glance at the lounging groups around showed him that the warming was not needless. Already there were hungry eyes gloating over the coveted bauble, and a knot of unshaven ruffians, hanging about the entrance of a court, began to nudge one another, and to whisper together in a manner that denoted no good intention. Lord Ulswater buttoned his coat. "You are my mentor to-night, Moss," he said, half carelessly; "and I suppose you know your clients better than I do." Then they strode on in silence.

The progress of the wayfarers was but slow, for there was much jostling on the crowded pavement, and many stationary groups, through which a passage had to be made by sheer force of pushing. Especially was this the case around the swing-doors of the illuminated gin-palaces, whence came forth gushes of light, as some fresh customer went slinking in or out, and which were certainly the most sumptuous edifices of which the long street could boast; for commerce in Great Popplewell Street was tainted by the corrupted atmosphere of the place, and assumed a weird and Walpurgis aspect. There were more stalls than shops, more barrows than stalls; and such shops as there were, open and unglazed, had flaring fan-tail gas-burners, whence the yellow glare fell fiercely on the coarse wares and viands, the old clothes and worn-out household gear, the fried fish, huge oysters, whelks, oranges, and garden-stuff, exposed on slabs and boards. There was much haggling and wrangling around the barrows and stalls, much scrambling, scuffling, and angry abuse, for the vendors had need of vigilance, seeing that around their tempting wares there prowled incessantly a

band of wolfish-eyed boys, ragged, desperate, barefooted, ever on the watch for a chance of snatching the wherewithal to sup, and so to forget their chronic hunger for a while.

"If those young gonophs—beg your pardon, my Lord—thieves, I mean," grumbled Mr. Moss, "were the only scamps we had to pass through, our work would be easy enough. I'll answer for it, they have tried our pockets a dozen times already, but I took care of *that* before."

And indeed Mr. Moss was right. That outlying part of the great city contains more dangerous personages than the wretched urchins, thieves from their cradles, for whom jails waited as the goal of their career. Great Popplewell Street is infamous in the annals of the London police-courts, for in and near it dwell ruffians to whom the sight of a glazed hat and a blue uniform is as scarlet to a bull, and whose lives are written in the criminal records of their country.

"Look! that shows your Lordship the sort of neighbourhood we're in!" whispered Mr. Moss once, griping Lord Ulswater by the arm, as four policemen went by in single file, wearing their

greatcoats, and with their cutlasses on. "You never saw that sort of thing in Piccadilly, I'll be sworn, but here it's common. Bless you, they think no more of murdering a solitary constable hereabouts than of killing a cockroach. Hist! come over to the left. I don't like the looks of that lot yonder."

The lot to which Mr. Moss alluded consisted of a knot of scowling, sullen-eyed men in frowsy fustian, hanging about the entrance to some narrow alley, that yawned blackly, like the mouth of a cavern. These were no half-starved striplings, like the juvenile pickpockets around the stalls, but sturdy scoundrels whom it would scarcely be pleasant to meet upon a lonely road after dark. They lounged about the mouth of the alley, as a shark slowly swims before the entrance to a harbour, waiting for prey. Whether Lord Ulswater was unwilling to comply with his guide's hint, or whether the attorney's words were drowned in the din around, is uncertain, but he held on his way steadily. The fellows at the end of the alley looked at one another, and then gathered together as if for a rush, and stopped, hesitating. The nearer

of the two intended victims looked too tall and too strong to make the projected onslaught a safe one. While they paused in doubt, thrusting one another forward, but reluctant to bear the brunt of the expected resistance, another and more powerful man, with beetling brows and a scarred face, came shouldering his way through them, snarling out curses at their cowardice.

"You tackle him, Bill. Let Bendigo Bill tackle the swell!" growled out three hoarse voices; and the master-ruffian made a dash at Lord Ulswater, and tried to tear his coat open. The confederates followed at their leader's heels, but fell back aghast, as Bendigo Bill, hurled against the wall behind him, fell crashing down upon the pavement, and lay without motion, like a log.

"We're in for it now," said Mr. Moss, bustling up to his companion's help; but at nearly the same instant a long-haired Jew-boy darted across the street, and gave a peculiarly shrill whistle, twice repeated. The men seemed to recognise this signal, for they drew back with a sheepish air, while a crowd began to collect.

There was a word or two interchanged between the lad who had whistled and one of the ruffians.

"Beg pardon, Mr. Moss; I didn't know you," said the man who had spoken to the Jew. "It's all a mistake."

"All right, Sam," answered Mr. Moss very affably; and he drew Lord Ulswater away before the others had succeeded in lifting the redoubted Bendigo Bill, breathing out feeble imprecations, from the slimy flagstones.

"I hope your Lordship will never come across that fellow again. He looked like one to bear malice, I'm afraid, and he'll never forgive you that knock-down blow," said the lawyer, seriously enough, as they proceeded on their way.

"I don't suppose his forgiveness is of much consequence to me," said Lord Ulswater, with his usual composure; "but I am much more curious as to that running-footman who seems to accompany our progress." And as he spoke he pointed to the Jew-lad who had whistled so opportunely, and who was now proceeding at a shuffling run upon the muddy kerbstone a few yards in advance.

The attorney chuckled with evident enjoy-

ment. "Ikey is a sharp child," said he; "he can talk the jargon of every gang hereabouts. And we don't trust entirely to Ikey, either," he added, calling Lord Ulswater's attention to the fact that a burly man, in a sailor's peacoat of rough cloth, was walking on the opposite side of the street, and evidently regulating his pace by that of Mr. Moss. Then he pointed to another man, in the white slop-suit of a navigator, who was loitering along the pavement a few yards behind. Both these men had hooked noses, broad jaws, and bristly blue beards; both were strong and active; and both looked like Jew prize-fighters, as very probably they were.

"There would have been two or three to back us up, if it had come to a scuffle yonder," observed Mr. Moss, as he pushed on; "but it's a deal better as it is." And at this instant they turned out of Great Popplewell Steet, and plunged into a net-work of lanes—very dark, dirty, and intricate—through which they threaded their way as best they might, guided by the little long-haired stripling, whose counter-sign had been acknowledged by their late adversaries. Here they met but very few

passers-by. Now and then, a female shape would glide past like a shadow, hover for a moment at the angle of the street, and finally be lost in the noisy, glaring vortex of the great thoroughfare that they had left. Presently, however, there came to their ears a dull roaring sound, that gradually increased in volume, and it was evident that they were approaching some other main artery of traffic and bustle. They pressed on, and the noises grew more various and distinct. They could hear the clamour of many voices, some loud in quarrel, some joining in the chorus of a drinking-song, the pauses in which were filled up by the strains of fiddles, the clinking of glasses, and the stamping of feet.

“We’re very near the water-side, now—the Docks, you know,” said Mr. Moss in his companion’s ear; “and this is one of the German dancing-houses where sailors go.” And he pointed to a large lighted window, where many forms might be indistinctly seen to pass and whirl behind the thin red curtain. The Jew-boy in advance now whistled shrilly. “We have arrived,” said Mr. Moss, coming to a dead stop. Close to the tall building whence came

the sounds of the dancing and clamorous revelry, so close, indeed, that every squeak of the fiddle, and every tipsy shout from the brawling mob within, was plainly audible through the thin wall, was a dismal old dwelling of blackened brickwork, with its windows looming forth, dark and mournful, as if in protest against the flare and glitter of the gas next door. Here Mr. Moss had halted, and he waited passively until the young Jew, who had bent his head down to the keyhole, and twice administered a series of graduated taps with his clenched hand to the blistered panels of the door, uttering at the same time a peculiar cry like the low twittering of a swallow, came back on tiptoe. Then the gleam of a candle flashed across one of the dark sad windows, and there was a sound of rusty bolts drawn back, and the door was grudgingly opened to the extent of about half its width. "Right, governor!" whispered Ikey; and Mr. Moss stepped forward without hesitation, and he and Lord Ulswater entered the house. The door was instantly reclosed and made fast. The woman who had admitted them was a wrinkled hag, with ragged gray locks falling from under

a tattered widow's cap, wore a seaman's great-coat, and had a short discoloured pipe in her mouth. This grisly janitress shaded her bleared eyes with her hand, and took a deliberate survey of the intruders.

"You be the lawyer chap?" she asked abruptly of Mr. Moss, speaking in the nasal accent of New England, uneffaced by years spent amid London fog and London gin. The attorney nodded. "And he be the swell? I've been looking for ye an hour, catching cold in the draughts. Come along this way." And she turned, and conducted them up the creaking stairs. It was evident that the house, deserted and desolate as it looked, had no lack of occupants. As they passed upwards, they heard the deep growl of several voices from both the rooms on the first floor; but there was no pause made until the old woman threw open the door of a room on the second story, and gruffly bade them enter. They complied; and their conductress, grumbling as she did so, set down the long-wicked candle on a chair, closed the door, and groped her way down-stairs again. Mr. Moss and his noble client looked around

them with some curiosity, for the chamber in which they were was oddly fitted up. The window was closed with boards, into the interstices of which clay had been tightly rammed, so that no ray of light could make its way from within to betray the late vigils of its tenant. Hot as the night was, a small stove, not only alight, but glowing dull red with the amount of fuel heaped within the bars, stood in front of the chimney-piece. A large screen divided the room into two equal parts, the smaller of which contained a mean truckle-bed, a sailor's chest, and some garments hanging to pegs and hooks. On the other side was a long table, on which stood a shaded lamp, which threw a strong light upon the objects at its foot. By this lamp, which was of the kind used by watchmakers, a small old man, with gray hair and whiskers, with red eyes, shrewd features, and a quaint resemblance to a sly old rat, with a horn-rimmed lens stuck by force of muscular compression in his left eye, was working with a steel file at some instrument analogous to a dentist's forceps. The table was littered with shining lumps of metal, broken moulds of plaster of Paris, dies and

punches of iron and steel, Hessian retorts, Cornish crucibles, blowpipes, spirit-lamps, vials of different shapes, chisels, pincers, and glass jars closely stoppered. There were also a smith's bellows and a galvanic battery, new and glossy, with the silvery amalgam of the zinc-plates uncorroded, and the French-polish of the mahogany stand undimmed by use.

"Coiner! A noted hand!" murmured Mr. Moss, parenthetically, in his companion's ear; and then addressing the old man by the title of "Professor Brum," asked him how he did.

"You ought not to let me see that, Brum, you know," the lawyer remarked in an ex-postulatory manner, pointing to a pile of cracked matrices that lay at the old man's elbow. "I may have to defend you some day, and call witnesses to character, you know. Some things are best kept dark."

Professor Brum, whose real name was doubtless preserved in writing by the Clerk of the Arraignment in Her Majesty's Central Criminal Court, but who was generally known in private life by his learned *alias*, looked up at the attorney with an odd twinkle in his wicked old

eyes. "I'm all right, Mr. Moss, sir," he chuckled out; "got a job—button-making—I have. They can't touch me for making buttons, can they, Mr. Moss, sir?" and he laughed inwardly, till the laugh ended in a fit of coughing that brought tears into his eyes as he slyly contemplated the tall gentleman standing by the lawyer's side.

"And about Jem Sark, Professor? how about Jem Sark and his plans, eh? You can tell us, you see, for it is not long since you and he smoked a pipe together, at the other side of the world—is it, Brum?"

"Four months, three weeks, and two days," observed the veteran numismatist, brushing the steel filings from his shabby sleeve. "I've no call to disguise the fact, Mr. Moss. My time's worked out, my time is. So far as being a returned transport goes, I might look in at Scotland Yard to-morrow, and leave my visiting-card on Sir Richard, I might. I'm not a run-away government man, *I ain't*."

"But you think that Sark probably may be—is not that your meaning?" asked Lord Ulswater quickly.

The old man looked more like a rat than ever, as he shewed his long yellow fangs in a grin. "I don't mean anything," he said with provoking composure, and resumed his work.

"Come, come, Professor," put in Mr. Moss in the most coaxing tone of his oily voice; "don't let us go back from our little mutual arrangement. Here's some eye-salve that will make you see my friend's meaning." And he counted down ten sovereigns on the blackened woodwork of the table.

"Take back your yellowboys, Mr. Moss," said the old man in his wheezy voice. "I've thought the matter over again. Second thoughts are safest, they are. It's not worth my while to get myself into Jem Sark's black books for ten pounds. With Dandy Jem, it's a word and a blow, and sometimes the blow comes first. If you doubled it, now?"

Mr. Moss bit his lips, and looked inquiringly at Lord Ulswater, who answered the look by a quick impatient nod. The lawyer at once produced from an inner pocket a crumpled bank-note, unfolded it, and laid it beside the sovereigns. The rat-like old man very coolly

and minutely scanned the water-mark and the signature. "Ah! that always was a cut above me!" he said with a little regretful sigh.

"Now speak, man," said Lord Ulswater, with a petulance unusual to him.

Professor Brum looked up with a quaint leer. "I will speak," said he, "and without more pressing. You want to know whether Jem Sark and the missus are likely soon to return to the country of which they used to be ornaments and blessin's. Well, all I've got to say is this: when a woman sets her heart upon a thing, in a general way she gets it, and specially when she's a handsome woman, and a clever woman, and a proud woman, and a woman with a spice of the devil in her, like Jem Sark's beautiful wife. That's all."

"Then she deceived me—she—it is her wish, not Sark's, to come back to England?" burst out Lord Ulswater with an irrepressible betrayal of his anger and surprise.

The old coiner took up the bribe in his lean hand, and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket. "All I say is this," he croaked out: "if there's anybody that Mrs. Sark has a grudge against—

if there's anybody Mrs. Sark has a hold upon— if there's anybody Mrs. Sark has the will and the power to ruin, let that party look out for his own interests, and soon too. If the sea was twice as wide, it couldn't keep her back. Poverty won't stop her. She and her husband will be back on English ground afore long, if they have to come as stowaways in the hold of a clipper—they will.—Now, Mr. Moss, you've had your money's worth for your money. I've got a job to finish. Leave me to my buttons."

They could extract no more information from him ; and they left him, being reconducted by the gaunt old New England woman to the street-door, where Ikey and the two able-bodied Jews awaited them. Their homeward course was unmarked by any adventure. At the corner of the Old Jewry, they parted company, Lord Ulswater springing into a Hansom that loitered there. "The Eleusis Club," he said ; "and drive fast !"

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE CLUB.

THE Eleusis was a small club—small, and very choice. It was a work of time, and patience, and strategy for the most eligible candidate to get himself enrolled in that exclusive band of brothers. Aspirants of inferior pretensions, after manœuvring for years to obtain the dubious privilege of being put up for ballot there, were sure to be blackballed without mercy. It was a far easier achievement to win a baronetcy, or the Grand Cross of the Bath, or to head a following in the House of Commons, than to become an Eleusinian. It was a very old club, and its reputation was historical. The great dandies of other days, the bloods and beaux of the Georgian reigns, had handled the dice-box and dealt the cards within its venerable walls. Provincials eyed it with respectful awe

as they passed its large bay-window. It was not very splendid or imposing to look upon, but there was a magic haze of prestige that surrounded it, and which lent it an enchantment in which the great palaces of political clubs were wholly lacking. The Eleusis might be beaten as to its cellar, and surpassed as to its cook; it was not upon such gross material merits as these that it took its stand, and based its claims to homage. Like the snowy summits of the Jungfrau, its chief charm lay in its extreme inaccessibility. Of this club, however, Lord Ulswater was a member.

It was late, and only two or three men were lingering in the smoking-room of the Eleusis. A stray Actæon of a bucolical visitor, could such a one have slipped unrebuked past the lynx-eyed porter in the hall, and so into the penetralia of the building, might not easily have discerned any peculiar nimbus encircling the beatified brows of these, the initiated. They were remarkable for nothing, unless it were for the terms of easy intimacy with one another on which they seemed to be. The Eleusinians, for the most part, knew each other. Their tastes

and habits were congenial, and their walk in life the same. Rank alone would no more carry a candidate triumphantly through that fiery ordeal of a ballot of theirs, than money or genius would do it. To be an Eleusinian was to be a man of fashion. The late Lord Ulswater, for instance, would probably have been rejected, had he put in a plea for membership. But the present peer, while still a younger brother, had gone through the perilous probation with triumphant success.

"Going anywhere?" asked one member of another, lazily beating off the white ashes from his cigar. "Nothing going on to-night worth looking in at, is there?"

"Nothing at all," answered the Eleusinian addressed, yawning unaffectedly. Nothing going on! It was the high tide of the London season. The rank, wealth, wit, and fashion of the greatest city in the world had gathered together within the Bills of Mortality, nay, within much narrower limits. There were two prima-donnas warbling to the grand tiers of two Italian Operas; there were ever so many brilliant theatres; perhaps a hundred crowded

parties, from Bloomsbury to Belgravia, were taxing the resources of London; that very night, there was a gigantic crush in Mayfair, whereat polite multitudes were collected. Each of these young gentlemen had a score of invitations lying dormant on his mantel-piece, but there is such a thing as a surfeit of sweetness, and the season had lasted some time.

“To be sure, there’s old Lady Dol’s dance!” said Chirper of the Life-guards, after further reflection.

“Horrid old bore!” returned Laxington, who might be described as of the Royal Yacht Squadron, since, out of town, he lived upon the Solent. That was all they said of a prodigious entertainment given to about eleven hundred of the Upper Ten Thousand, if such a sacred myriad there be, and at which every one was supposed to be enjoying the splendid hospitality of the Right Hon. the Marchioness of Dol-drums, of Castle Despond, in the kingdom of Ireland. This *grande dame*, of whose ball the *Morning Post* of the morrow would discourse as of a stolen glimpse of Fairyland, was the “Lady Dol” thus contemptuously alluded to.

"You ought to be there, Laxington, and dancing away like a good young man. And so ought I, for the matter of that. They'll say we weren't asked. Crawley will, I know," said Lieutenant Chirper.

"So much the better. Quite a distinction. It's a deal pleasanter here. I wonder how hot they find themselves now, by Jove! at Lady Dol's," suggested Mr. Laxington, very placidly.

"Flora Hastings will be there, I know. The belle of the season. Splendid she looked last night at York House!" said a third member of the group, Tregooze of the Colonial Office, a rising man, who was thought to govern his chief, and to be a cabinet minister in embryo.

"Belle of the season! as if there were not half-a-dozen belles of the season. Hate the word! it puts me in mind of a bad novel," sneered Chirper of the Life-guards.

"You never read a novel, or any other book, in your life, Chirper, my boy!" said Mr. Tregooze serenely; "and Miss Hastings is the belle of the season, in spite of you. Beautiful girl she is, for those that like fair women at least; but it's a pity she should be going to

marry that muff, Morgan : though I know he's got lots of tin," added the speaker almost deprecatingly, for money has a mysterious power to blunt the edge of hostile criticism.

"I know," said Laxington, "that we'd particularly pill him, if he got himself put up for ballot *here*; and that's all I know about him. He's got a yacht—the *Wing*; he bought her from Troytown, when Charley went to the bad; a pretty thing she is, and very fast—but we declined the honour of his company in our little place at Cowes, when he got old Boodleborough to propose him."

"I rather like Morgan," observed Mr. Tregooze, between the puffs of his cigar. "I think he's a slow fellow, but not a bad one. He was my fag at Eton, and used to catch it awfully for burning the toast and spilling"—puff!—"the coffee over his master's knees. He is sure to be in parliament, and for the county too, next election. He's as rich as the Duke of Towcester. His character is very good. The old ironmaster, his father, who began life with a pickaxe and twelve bob a week, left him such a fortune in land, stock, scrip, and shares, as the

Chancellor of the Exchequer would give his ears to confiscate. He has got a yacht, and is sea-sick; hunters, and can't ride; race-horses, and forgets his own jockey's colours. He has no relation except that poor girl with the crooked spine—Miss Ruth, you know—the sister. He reads blue-books till his eyes ache; and he's to marry Flora Hastings."

"Well, he can afford it; I can't," said Laxington, throwing away the stump of his cigar.—
"Are you going my way, Chirper?"

"Yes," said Chirper, getting slowly on his feet; "and so is Tregooze."

But Tregooze was not going to quit the club with Laxington and Chirper. "I promised to meet a man here. I must give him a little law. It's Ulswater."

"O yes, you great political swells all hang together," chirruped Chirper. "I'm afraid to speak to Ulswater after that speech of his, and all the puffs the papers gave him. He'll be premier, ten years hence, if he don't train too fine.—Good-night!" And they went.

Mr. Tregooze left alone, smoked and fidgeted, and looked repeatedly at his watch. It was

late. He was tired. The club was deserted; and the smoking-room waiter, to whom sleep was precious, hovered about the door, and eyed him wistfully, hoping that he would go. But Mr. Tregooze did not go. He was under obligations to Lord Ulswater. But for the friendship of John Carnac, Arthur Tregooze would never have been a member of the Eleusis; so he waited.

At last Lord Ulswater came in with a quick tread. His smooth broad brow wore an unusual look of trouble upon it.

"Too bad, I call this. An hour and twenty minutes behind time! An awful sacrifice to friendship, in my opinion," said Tregooze of the Colonial Office from his divan. Then, dropping his light tone at the sight of the new-comer's dark looks, he added earnestly: "By George! Carnac, I hope it's nothing serious. Nothing wrong, old boy?"

Lord Ulswater shook his head. "There is nothing serious the matter; and I may say there is nothing wrong," he made answer, in a voice that he vainly tried to render careless and joyous. "But—you're a good fellow, Tregooze, and I do believe that if there were a screw loose,

I might ask you to help me as confidently as any man in London, to say the least of it."

"Try me when you like," answered Tregooze, getting up from his place. "I never make prosy speeches. But I should be a more ungrateful beggar than I am, Ulswater, if I did not recollect half a score of good turns that you have done me, first and last; so, if I can be of use, just say the word, and I shall not hang back, I promise you."

Lord Ulswater stretched out his strong right hand, the hand that an hour or two before had beaten down Bendigo Bill upon the greasy pavement of Great Popplewell Street, and grasped the delicate white fingers of his studious friend. "Thanks, Tregooze," he said simply; and then added: "Can't you do pretty much as you like, you Colonial Office magnificoes, in Australia still—unofficially, I mean, of course?"

Mr. Tregooze did not understand.

"I mean," said the other hesitatingly—"can you not still get good information as to the character and conduct of conditionally liberated convicts? Could you not push a protégé, or, in case of need, put a spoke in the wheel of a

badly-disposed fellow? The police, I believe, are very high-handed and influential at the antipodes. I have a reason for asking."

"I see," said Mr. Tregooze slowly: "no doubt, unofficially, we can do something. An official dispatch would set up the backs of the colonial functionaries, and cause the local press to bray out its wrath at our meddling propensities. But a quiet note—why, yes. What is it about?"

"It is Western Australia that I am thinking of. There is a convict there, one Sark, James Sark. I have reason to believe he means to take French-leave, and return home, which would be disagreeable to me, I frankly own, for reasons which, if you please, I will——"

"No, no reasons. Always avoid painful explanations!—Well, my dear Ulswater, I'll do it for you; for you, mind,—though, if the *Trumpet of Freedom* got hold of the story, I should be but a lost politician.—If Mr. James Sark leaves Australia before the expiration of his legal sentence, I give you leave to put me in the pillory.—Good-night, old boy—good night."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SCENE SHIFTS.

It was on the fourteenth day of Ruth Morgan's visit at St. Pagans, and the eighth since the evening on which her hostess, grimly-kind Lady Harriet, had told her the story of the Monk. There were no gray mists now, no shrieking wind tearing at the casements, no groan of the sullen waves among the caverns of the coast-line. The old abbey and its surroundings looked almost cheerful in the noontide glory of the day. High up above the crisp turf of the downs, the lark floated, pouring down those floods of trembling music that welled fast and faster from his little throat, far off in the hot blue air. The July sun—it was July now—turned the very mosses upon the weather-beaten stones of the abbey into a royal drapery of cloth of gold,

tinged the summer haze with flame-hued splendours, shed a warmer lustre over the pale purity of the unsullied chalk-cliff, and made the sea shine like a monstrous opal, shimmering in endless undulations of white, yellow, azure, and green, for leagues away across the level waters.

Ruth rose late. To her, as to that sad sisterhood of sufferers to which she belonged, bodily weakness denied the enjoyment of the blithe morning air, the exhilarating sparkle and buoyancy of the fresh young day. Her poor breakfast was taken up-stairs; and it was past noon when, leaning on the arm of her maid, she came down, to find her entertainer, with a flush of excitement on her rigid old face, awaiting her in the Tapestry Room, an open letter in her hand.

“There, dear, read that!” said Lady Harriet, almost snappishly. “I was afraid you would be dull here, shut up with me, but here is something to enliven us. Mrs. Hastings writes me word that her husband is ill, down at Shellton Manor, in the full London season, with parliament sitting, and a great deal of public business left undone. However, he has got the gout, and must stay where he is, and his family have

been obliged to join him. It seems cruel to tear Miss Flora away from all her London triumphs ; but Mrs. Hastings seems to consider there is no chance of their being able to get back to town before the end of the session. They arrived last evening, and one of the grooms from the Manor came up on horseback with this note half-an-hour ago. I should have been glad to have my neighbours near me again, only that they generally manage to fill their house with tiresome company—young ladies of the modern school of manners, and young gentlemen to match, to whom I cannot talk, and who come to St. Pagans and stare at me as if I was a fossil."

"I do hope my brother will come. I am sure he will, now that Flora Hastings is to be here. I shall be so glad to see him months before I expected to do so," said Ruth, with a sudden brightness in her large eyes. She had been now a fortnight at the abbey, and her only brother had not only not come down to see her, but in his letters, which were frequent, if short, he had not hinted at any intention of doing so—and yet Shellton is within a short railway journey of the great city. William Morgan was a good

brother, as brothers go. It would perhaps have been hardly reasonable to expect him fully to reciprocate, or even to understand, the depth of his invalid sister's excessive love for him. He was fond of her, certainly, very fond, and had a sincere pity for her afflicted state. If there had been in Europe any marvellous elixir, too costly for common purses to compass its purchase, and by the aid of which Ruth could have been cured of her bent spine and failing health, at the price of, say a hundred thousand pounds, William Morgan would cheerfully have signed his name to a cheque for that amount. If she could have eaten gold, as the saying is, or have cared to sip molten pearls, like Cleopatra, her brother would not have grudged her those luxuries. He had once taken her to Malaga for the winter ; though the time hung so heavily on his hands there, that he had never since been courageous enough to essay a similar act of self-sacrifice. It was not his fault that she was not in the habit of passing the cold season of fogs and east winds at Mentone or Algiers, or Cannes or Cairo, or at any of the modern Bethesdas most in fashion, with some penniless old widow of rank for a

chaperon, with her maids, and carriage, and courier, and as thick a volume of circular-notes as ever gladdened the eyes of woman.

But Mr. Morgan quite forgot how very precious was the sight of the only face she loved on earth in the eyes of his suffering sister, and he made no proposition of running down to the lone old abbey on the cliff, previous to the unexpected transference of the Hastings family from London to the sea-side. He had an excuse, to be sure, fro that preoccupation of his thoughts which made him often negligent to Ruth, though never unkind: he was in love, had made his offer, and had been accepted. Flora Hastings, whom those competent authorities, the Eleusinians, had pronounced the belle of the current season, had promised to be his wife. She was one of the loveliest young women in England, and perhaps one of the best, graceful, high-bred, and accomplished, with the sweetness of temper without which the rarest gifts of mind and body are often but as sour grapes and Dead-sea apples. Flora Hastings was quite young. It was but her second season in the high-pressure London life, and it was truly said that she was twice as

beautiful as she had been when she was first presented at court the year before. She had no money, certainly, Belgravia said—eight or ten thousand pounds at most; for Mr. Hastings would leave nothing away from his son, and the fortune of Flora's mother would for the most part pass away at her death. But William Morgan did not want money. Beauty, and tenderness, and grace—Miss Hastings was well dowered with these, and she could bring him, too, the mystic prestige of aristocratic connection, that all his father's over-brimming wealth had not yet availed to buy, or to render unnecessary. He was an ambitious man, in one sense of the word; and though he was really in love, he was not insensible to the worldly advantages of the match. It would give him the one thing without which his vast fortune was but as Aladdin's palace without the roc's egg and the twenty-fourth window.

The father of the belle, or of, at any rate, one of the reigning belles, and that the best esteemed, of the London season, was a type of a small but very important body of Englishmen. The Right Honourable Robert Drummond Eliot

Hastings had been in parliament ever since the termination of his legal period of infancy, and in office, at short intervals, nearly as long. He claimed cousinship with most of what are called, rather too sweepingly, perhaps, the governing families of England ; and the governing families had been so good as to allow the claim, and to give a practical illustration in the speedy promotion of their kinsman of the proverb that declares blood to be thicker than water. Mr. Hastings was no orator, but he was listened to with that respect which the House always shows for a good man of business. He was seldom spoken of in the newspapers, but rarely, if ever, without such a modicum of cold praise as suited his solid if not showy qualities. He was laborious, punctilious, and clear-headed, would have made an excellent clerk, and was a good working minister. He held high office, presiding over one of those departments that deal with facts and figures and dry tabulated statements ; needful, no doubt, but the details of which are caviare to the general public. He had a moderate patrimony, had married a rich wife, who was related to the House of Carnac,

had saved money, and had purchased the manor of Shellton-on-Sea, with a good house of the gray masonry and peaked gables of 1620, and seven or eight hundred acres of barren land. Thither he was accustomed to repair sometimes, having a robust faith that the sea was the true Medea's caldron for the conversion of old people into young ones; and here the gout had surprised him, and chained him captive, let Downing Street chafe never so much.

To Lady Harriet Ashe, *locum tenens* of the abbey of St. Pagans, this illness of her principal neighbour was a great event. Few folks really like seclusion; and although Lady Harriet railed against the yellow-whiskered puppies who were plentiful at Shellton Manor in the two or three months of fine weather that followed the prorogation of parliament, she was secretly more pleased than she cared to own, that her hermitage should be so often invaded. It is better to be stared at as a fossil old maid, or as St. Mundinga once more in the flesh, or in any other capacity, than to rust unseen by human eye; and if Lady Harriet did not acknowledge this truth in theory, she owned it in practice.

There were no grounds for apprehension about the ailment of her friend, or rather the husband of her friend—the gout does not kill, save on very rare and special occasions. The Right Honourable Robert was likely to draw his stipend and discharge his duties for many a year yet to come.

But Lady Harriet and her guest were, both of them, surprised, and a little startled withal, when, in the course of that long warm afternoon, when the sea lay like a sheet of gilded glass, and the hum of a bewildered bee knocking its honest head against the window-pane was the only sound audible, the butler came in with creaking tread to announce “My Lord.” Old Hicks himself was quite excited—his Lord—who, after all, was the master who paid his wages, and whose noble father and brother he had served—came so seldom. Since the house had been his, nay, since young Guy Carnac, his nephew, had been laid in his little coffin, Lord Ulswater’s visits had been rare as those of angels.

How noble, and fair, and frank he looked, as he came in now, with a pleasant smile on his bright face, and bent to kiss Lady Harriet’s

furrowed brow, as was his wont when a boy. "You won't refuse me house-room for a few days," he said—"will you, aunt? I hardly like to break into your castle without due notice, but I trust that you and Miss Morgan will forgive my rude intrusion here.—Nonsense—St. Pagans is not mine, you know. It is yours by long usage, and I only want a corner of it, and will not be troublesome.—Miss Morgan, I had the pleasure of your brother's company on the journey down. He is at Shellton, at the *Regent Hotel*. I daresay we shall see him to-morrow. You will excuse my saying that I like him immensely. He and I had a long chat, coming down."

And before the evening closed, Lady Harriet found an opportunity of saying in her young friend's ear what a good dear fellow was John, the best of nephews, who had come down to a house he evidently did not like, in the full London season, to see his old aunt. "For why else should he have come, my dear?" said the old lady triumphantly. Why indeed?

CHAPTER VIII.

AN INOPPORTUNE VISIT.

LADY HARRIET was in a flutter of delighted astonishment at her nephew's unpremeditated visit. She insisted on regarding it as a compliment to herself; and the good old woman's heart smote her because, in her fondness for Reginald, she had cared little for John. The bright boy, whom every one liked, had seemed to stand in no need of her affection. The noble, high-spirited youth, the man whose career was one of lofty promise, found friends everywhere. The good grim aunt had been almost jealous of John Carnac's popularity, in which her own favourite, the shy and moody heir, had no portion. But she reproached herself for this involuntary injustice. No one held the present head of the House in higher esteem than did

she. That he should leave the glitter of London and his successes in parliament, to pass days in the dull seclusion of St. Pagans, was merely another instance of that unselfishness of disposition which was his chief charm in her eyes.

In the eyes of Ruth Morgan, Lord Ulswater found less favour, though she knew not why. Most men liked this man, and nearly all women. But among those who felt themselves drawn towards the chief of the Carnac family, Ruth was not numbered. Some strange instinct within her was awakened by his presence, and it cried aloud to her to beware; it repelled her from him, and made her shrink and draw back, afraid, with an unreasoning fear. Some of us have felt and marvelled at this thrill of irrational antipathy, this innate distrust of some fellow-creature whom the world combines to honour, even as it lavished its brightest smiles upon John, Baron Ulswater. She was not one of those who are willingly unjust, this poor ailing girl, to whom life was so arid and so brief. She blamed herself, in that she disliked Lord Ulswater, whom she had seldom seen, and of whom she had

heard nothing but good ; but she reluctantly admitted to herself her own dislike to him. She had resisted it, but the dark fiend of formless Suspicion would not be exorcised. She, in the innocence of a pure heart and a blameless life, knew not that the dark fiend sometimes deserves to be held as a saving angel, as Ithuriel's self, poised high on falcon wings, with heavenly spear outstretched towards the fair surface that covers hidden guilt.

It was not Ruth's fault if she shrank away from the glance of Lord Ulswater's eye, or the touch of Lord Ulswater's hand. She had been, at first, well disposed to like him, but that was because he was dear old Lady Harriet's nephew, and before they had met face to face. She did not like him, and she was angry with herself for the prejudice which she could not conquer.

The owner of St. Pagans may or may not have been aware of this repugnance towards himself on the part of his aunt's guest, but at any rate he did not resent it. Gentle and courteous to all women, he was especially considerate to ailing Ruth, and the charm of his manner by degrees overcame her aversion to

him. Very few, indeed, were those who could remain long in the company of John Carnac, from the days of his childhood up to these latter times, without experiencing, in a greater or less degree, the strange power to please that seems a birthright of certain natures. By the middle of the day following Lord Ulswater's arrival at his own neglected mansion, Ruth Morgan had begun to tell herself that she had judged him ill. She had never seen him before, save in London, and he had never addressed to her more than a very few words at a time; but now that they two were thrown together in the lone country-house upon the cliff, she could not but note that no word ever fell from Lord Ulswater's lips that was not generous and kind. Men of such acknowledged parts as his, as Ruth knew well, were often apt to be cynical in speech, if not in deed. From any affectation such as this, Lord Ulswater was free. It seemed as if his genia nature followed its natural bent in taking the broader and more indulgent view of the motives and actions of those around him. He was very kind and patient, too, listening to Lady Harriet's rather discursive talk without any sign

of weariness. And as Ruth, from her sofa in the Tapestry Room, watched him leaning on his elbow in the open window overlooking the gold and purple of the summer sea, she could not explain to herself by what prodigy of Unreason she could have learned to dread, and almost to hate, the gallant gentlemen before her.

The morning had gone by, and the hands of the clock were traversing the dial plate towards the dinner-hour, but no communication had taken place between the new-comers at Shellton-on-Sea and the inmates of the abbey. Lord Ulswater had shown no intention of making his way across the downs on that day either to the watering-place or the Manor where the gouty statesman lay a prisoner; and William Morgan, Esquire, of Plâs Vawr and Bettwys Vychan, in Wales, of Stoneham and Nettlington Halls, in the counties of Stafford and Northampton respectively, and of Cramlingham in the county of Hants, did not appear in any very violent hurry to visit his sick sister at St. Pagans. Yet Ruth felt sure that he would come. Her quick ear caught the roll of wheels upon the flinty down-road, some moments before

the sound was audible to her companions ; and then came the shrill clang of the bell at the lodge-gate, where once the almoner of the monastery had dealt out a daily dole of food and silver-pennies to a ragged army of beggars. But it was not Mr. Morgan who was announced. There was some disappointment on Ruth's pale face, and the light faded from her eager eyes, as the butler came in to say that the caller was "Dr. Marsh, of Shellton-on-Sea, who wished very much to see my Lord."

"Mr. Marsh, from Shellton? What can the man want?" said Lady Harriet unthinkingly; and then catching a glimpse of her nephew's countenance, could not help exclaiming, "What is the matter, dear? Are you ill?"

"Ill?—not I?" answered the object of her solicitude, turning away with an impatient gesture. There was nothing remarkable in the words themselves, but there are some accents of the voice which convert the most commonplace remark into something like a curse. Lord Ulswater had said nothing at which the most sensitive had a right to take umbrage, but the savage tone spoke for itself; and besides, both

Lady Harriet and Ruth, ay, and the old serving-man as well, had seen that sudden, ghastly whiteness spread over the young Lord's comely face—not the pallor of vulgar fear, but a stony horror that might have become one whose fated gaze had fallen on Medusa's dreadful beauty, glaring from the shield of doom. No, the words were nothing, but the voice in which they were spoken was terrible. There was a pause, long and unpleasant, but no one cared to break the awkward silence.

Very slowly, and after a delay that was probably magnified by the imagination of the two women, Lord Ulswater turned from the window, and fronted them. He was pale still, but the look of haggard misery and hopeless despair that his noble face had worn a little while before had passed away; there was the old sunny light in his frank eyes, and he smiled, though with an effort that he took no trouble to dissemble. "I was rude," he said, with the grace that was natural to him; "I beg your pardon. As harp pain—I sometimes feel it now—made me faint and giddy for the moment, and I am always cross when in pain, as you remember, aunt, I

daresay. Perhaps Mr. Marsh may do me good—he is clever, and I think he understands my constitution better than London doctors can do.” Quite unaffectedly he spoke, and while he uttered the first sentence he kept his hand to his left side, as if the pang that had unnerved him had not yet ceased. No more than this was wanted to make Lady Harriet rise from her seat, overflowing with sympathy, and suggest various cordials and essences, lamenting the prevalence, now-a-days, of heart-complaints as compared with the period of her own far-off youth. “But you write, and read, and think a great deal more than we did, dear John,” she said, “and a great deal more than is good for you. I was afraid, when I read of your great doings in the House——”

“But I am well now, quite well,” said Lord Ulswater resolutely.—“Tell her not to pity me, Miss Morgan, for I should be a miserable impostor if I gave myself the airs of an invalid. I am as strong as Samson, I believe. London and late hours would have tried him pretty sharply, but you will not see the last of me just yet.—Hicks, where is the doctor?”

"Tower Room, my Lord," said the butler promptly. "Would your Lordship prefer——"

"No ; the Tower Room will do as well as another," said his master with his usual easy indifference of manner ; and smiling, he left the two ladies together, and strode along the vaulted passage, Hicks trotting on briskly in front, like an elderly raven. The establishment at St. Pagans was not one of those grandiose households where there are house-stewards and majordomos and grooms of the chambers. The revenues of the Carnacs were not considerable, for their rank at least, though they were far above the average rent-roll of an untitled country gentleman. Lady Harriet was not fond of display, and if she had been ostentatious in her tastes, she would have scrupled to gratify them at her nephew's charges. Hicks grumbled a little when in his old age his command of household retainers was pared and clipped ; but he had two men in livery under his orders still, and with these he had made as brave a show as might be, to receive the medical guest. Few of the Shellton people, except Mrs. Marjory, the vicar's wife, had the privilege of exchanging

calls with Lady Harriet ; and the veteran butler was not above dazzling the eyes of Mr. Marsh, surgeon, and doctor by brevet of common parlance, by exhibiting the coroneted buttons of Charles and Thomas in the entrance-hall.

Whether the splendour of the footmen had produced the desired effect, or whether Mr. Marsh had something on his mind, it was certain that he looked nervous and uneasy as Hicks respectfully closed the door of the apartment and left him in presence of Lord Ulswater. He came forward, smirked and bowed, and then bowed again, and bit his lip, and murmured some feeble commonplace about a disinclination to intrude. Then he took the chair to which Lord Ulswater motioned him, and cast a quick glance, almost a glance of suspicion, around him. The Tower Room was remote from the apartments commonly used by the family, and it is probable that the butler's only motive in conducting the visitor so far was a desire to show him the extent of the mansion. It was, with the exception of the porch, the most ancient portion of the original structure, and in it, according to tradition, the monks had been ac-

customed to place their charters and church-plate, their treasure-chest and other valuables, as in the most secure spot, whether against fire or thieves. The walls, of solid masonry, were enormously thick, and the ceiling was low, and studded with beams of black oak, ungainly, but strong enough to defy decay. There were four windows, which had once been grated with iron, but these obstacles to daylight and burglars had been removed. Indeed, the Tower Chamber stood so close to the terraced face of the cliff, that no robber unprovided with wings could well have gained access to it from without, and on each side a jutting buttress projected over the dizzy precipice itself. The room, which was seldom entered, was sumptuously furnished after the taste of King George the Second's courtiers, and contained a quantity of China monsters, tall Japan jars, Indian screens, French upholstery, and Dutch pictures, which had no doubt cost Augustus, Baron Ulswater, known in family history as the Wild Lord, a very great sum of money. With all this incongruous finery, the old Tower Room had but a dark and melancholy aspect, even on that summer's day.

Meanwhile Lady Harriet, who loved to talk, and to whom new themes were scarce, gave her young friend the benefit of her ideas regarding the intruder. "I do not like the man," she said, honestly outspoken as ever. "I did not like him, even when Dr. Dennis was going about singing the praises of the wonderful talented young assistant who had come to lighten his hard work for him.—Clever? Yes, I believe he is clever. He studied in Germany, and is a good doctor, they tell me. But I never could forgive the man his ingratitude in setting up at Shellton-on-Sea, in opposition to his kind old employer, and doing all he could to make poor Dennis ridiculous, and coax away his patients. He is an unprincipled fellow, I am sure. He was very poor when first Dr. Dennis took him into his house. Then he got money, no one knew how, and took a fine house on the Royal Parade, and set up to practise on his own account. There are plenty of things said about him in Shellton-on-Sea; not that I care about watering-place gossip and scandal, my dear; but they say he is seldom sober now. He married a farmer's daughter, and I believe he leads her a

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sad life, poor thing. None of the best people call him in, but he goes a good deal among the poor—he is the workhouse doctor, I know—and I suspect he has come here to ask John for money to get comforts for his pauper patients—John is always good to the poor, and everybody knows that. A kinder heart no man ever had. When poor little Guy died, John felt it terribly, terribly, for Reginald's sake. He said little, but I saw how sad he was, dear fellow." And thus the good garrulous old lady ran on in her nephew's praise.

CHAPTER IX.

BAFFLED.

MR. MARSH, member of the College of Surgeons, sat upon the edge of his chair, squeezing his hat between his bony arm and his lean body, as wiry, pallid, and unwholesome a medical practitioner as could be readily found. His dark eyes were restless and bloodshot; there were scars upon his pointed chin, that showed how the razor had trembled in his hand when he shaved away his harsh blue beard; the hands themselves, in their new gloves of dark-green kid, were very unsteady and unquiet. A fine perfume of rum, qualified by the odour of drugs, hung about Mr. Marsh and his habiliments. He was rather shabby, but carefully dressed, with a neckcloth elaborately arranged, with clean wristbands, and a well-brushed hat. His mouth

expressed much ill-humour, it is true; his features were mean, and his rough hair had the appearance of having been dipped in a dyer's vat, it was so very coarse and so very black; but he had a shrewd look, too, and a good frontal development, battered and dilapidated as he was. A knave he might be, but no fool.

Yet he sat there, eyeing Lord Ulswater from under his shaggy brows, and blinking owlshly, without speaking. The master of the house had to begin the conversation. "You wish to speak with me, Mr. Marsh. We have not met for some time. I cannot guess the object of your visit," said Lord Ulswater gravely.

Mr. Marsh broke out into a crowing laugh, quite unexpectedly, and wagged his head from side to side, as he made answer: "O yes, you can, my Lord—yes, you can. Don't tell *me*. You know you know it!" And he let his hat drop upon the carpet with a dull thud, and passed his gloved fingers through his ragged dark hair, and repeated the crowing laugh. He had been drinking, to brace up his nerves for the interview, long anticipated, and the

liquor had mounted suddenly to his brain, and had disposed him to be insolent and defiant.

Lord Ulswater's voice was serious and almost sad as he bent forward and said : " Marsh, I am sorry for this—a man of your ability, and your learning and experience—I really am sorry for this. It is a bad habit."

While speaking thus, in a slow, impressive way, Lord Ulswater made an effort to catch the man's eye, and at last he succeeded. The visitor, when once his own shifting black eyes were confronted with the steady blue eyes of Lord Ulswater, could not withdraw them, and he winced and moved awkwardly in his chair, and presently covered his face with his hands, and began to cry. "It is a bad habit ; you're quite right, my Lord. I ask pardon. I'm a wretched, broken man, and my whole comfort is in drink, though it is killing me, killing me." The last words were uttered in a sort of whining voice, that would rather have seemed to befit the throat of a scourged hound, than of any creature in human shape, though never so degraded and sunken in the great Dismal Swamp of Drink. The attitude of the man, as

well as his tone, was miserably abject, as he sat crouching, with his face hidden between his tremulous hands. But Lord Ulswater's face, though it was eloquent with the scorn he cared not to conceal, showed none of the confidence that springs from contempt. He knew how readily the tears rise to the eyes of a drunkard, and he knew, too, how quickly the unstable moods of drunkards are apt to change, from maudlin penitence to brutal fury, or dull apathy, or noisy boastfulness. In this instance, however, there was no abrupt transition, but Mr. Marsh slowly allowed his hands to drop upon his knees, drew himself up, and sat silent for a little while, evidently busy in disentangling the ravelled clue of his ideas. His eyes gradually became less restless, and the quivering of his lean fingers almost wholly ceased. The astute brains of the man, sorely bemuddled by intemperance, were not yet irreparably sunk in the fiery Lethe of the spirit-bottle, and an effort of their owner's will could still clear them upon occasion, though with great and increasing difficulty. He looked and spoke well-nigh like a sober person, as he resumed the broken conversation.

“My Lord,” said Mr. Marsh, “I owe an apology to you for my late conduct. I have had much to vex and trouble me latterly, and have been far from well, and—and have been injudicious in the over-free use of stimulants. I am indebted for so much to your Lordship’s generous patronage, that it is painful to me to appear before you, my benefactor, in such a light as I fear I have done. I beg of you, Lord Ulswater, to believe that my presence here this day is unconnected with any intentional disrespect.”

“You mean well, Marsh, I am sure,” said Lord Ulswater quietly. “You have not yet told me, though, what you do mean; and I cannot guess your exact drift.”

“I will explain my purpose, with your Lordship’s leave,” returned the surgeon, while a sickly smile flitted over his face for an instant. “I should be singularly ungrateful if I did not remember that it was by your liberality that I was enabled to give up my humble post as assistant to Dr. Dennis, and set up for myself at Shellton-on-Sea, the inhabitants of which, I must say, are a pack of the most narrow-minded provincial curs that ever——”

"They don't appreciate you, Marsh, eh? That is your meaning, I conclude?" interrupted Lord Ulswater, with a slight but expressive gesture of weariness.

Mr. Marsh writhed deferentially, and moved his ugly head like a serpent dancing to the flute of the snake-charmer. Then, little by little, his grievances were revealed. He had taken an expensive house in the dearest quarter of the watering-place, had furnished it, partly on credit, and had married, fully trusting that his unquestioned ability and his social tact would secure for him the lion's share of the practice, hitherto enjoyed by his old employer, Dr. Dennis. Mr. Marsh, however, had to learn by sad experience that patients look for character as well as for talent in their medical man, and that sentiment enters largely into the relations of mankind towards each other. The town was up in arms from the first on account of the new doctor's reputed ingratitude to good, easy-going old Dennis, and, once prepared to dislike Mr. Marsh, their antipathy was not suffered to die out for lack of fuel. The Upper Ten Dozen of Shellton speedily found out that the obnoxious

doctor drank; that he was a bad paymaster; that he went to church certainly, but for their *beaux yeux* alone, and because it is respectable to go to church, and that he was in the habit of descanting irreverently upon solemn subjects when among choice spirits in the parlour of the *Red Lion*. There was more than this that was whispered to the doctor's detriment—vague, discreditable reports, that nobody could trace to any definite source, but which, like the Eumenides, tracked down their victim from afar, and which easily convinced a prejudiced audience that Mr. Marsh was a dangerous person, unfit for family practice.

The surgeon married; but even that meritorious act was made by his evil stars to serve as a means for plunging his reputation still deeper in the slough of scandal. He married the daughter of a gentleman-farmer of the county, an empty-headed, rosy-cheeked young woman, with a strong taste for fine clothes and idleness, a half-educated, shallow-eyed lass, whom it would have taken the best of husbands to have converted into even a tolerable wife. Mr. Marsh was not a good husband; extravagance and

folly on the one side, intemperance and irritability on the other, produced their natural result in a plenteous crop of quarrels, in tears, oaths, shrewishness, abuse, hysterics, blows. It was no secret in Shellton that Mr. Marsh often beat his wife. He had indeed been once admonished by the magistrates sitting in petty sessions at the *Regent Hotel*, and had been bound over in recognizances to keep the peace towards his Mary Ann. Rough music had been played at night under his windows; the street-boys jeered him as he went by; his few paying patients fell off; he lost sundry pounds annually by his parish appointment; his credit sank to zero, and those to whom he owed money sued him in the County Court. His sole practice was among the poor, to whom he administered drugs and advice gratis, not that he cared any more for the poor than Judas did, but because even unpaid employment was less disgraceful, in a professional point of view, than absolute inaction.

In all this modern version of a medical Rake's Progress down the black road to ruin, there was nothing very extraordinary; the wonder was rather in the patience with which

Lord Ulswater listened to its details. He was much kinder and less proud in his bearing than he had been towards the thieves' attorney, and yet Mr. Marsh was a more repulsive personage than Mr. Moss. When the surgeon had finished his tale, Lord Ulswater paused for a moment, and then rejoined : " Now, Marsh, I knew from the first that this plan of yours would not answer any good end. Recollect, that when I undertook to do something for you, I by no means approved of that Shellton project. It was not a hopeful scheme. The practice was limited, and——"

" Ah ! but I wanted to cut out old Dennis, the stupid old prig, with his fossil notions and his slow mind ; and Mrs. D., too, with her high and mighty patronage of her betters ; and the daughters, who turned up their conceited noses at the poor shabby assistant's old coat—I owed them all a grudge, and I wanted to shew them the sort of stuff I was made of !" broke out Mr. Marsh, with a sudden flaming up of the envious malignity that lay dormant within him, and he clenched his bony fist and shook it stealthily at some imaginary offender.

Lord Ulswater frowned, and his tone was cold, and almost severe as he made answer: "You told me nothing of this at the time, and had you done so, I should have proved less compliant. But I thought, and I see that I thought rightly, that you would do far better abroad."

Mr. Marsh had lost sight of his penitence by this time, and he was rapidly getting rid of his humility. "Abroad, my Lord? Yes, yes, I should think so; and the further the better, eh? America was the country for a pushing medical practitioner, in your Lordship's opinion, I remember. South America better still than North; he! he! Mexico, California, Pike's Peak, Gippsland, best of all, I should say. Some nice snug place on the other side of the world, with plenty of snakes, sickness, and cut-throat company, plenty of liquor going, too, and no intellectual associates—just the place for a man of education to drink himself into the next world. Aha! my Lord! I'm obliged all the same." And the wretch actually snapped his fingers, and grinned wolfishly.

Lord Ulswater's face became very white, but

not with fear. "Idiot!" he said, with a quick, involuntary glance at the window nearest him—"idiot, to insult me, and to do so *here!*" And he made a slight movement as he spoke—such a movement as the lion makes before he bounds upon the narrowing ring of spears that hem him in closer and closer at every step of the hunters.

Mr. Marsh also glanced at the window, like a picture framed in the thick wall of the tower. It was open; the soft sea-breeze stole gently in, and with the breeze the low wash of the gurgling sea among the boulders at the cliff-foot. Without, nothing could be seen but a lazy white cloud floating in the blue, save when a gull's wing flapped swiftly past the casement. The window overlooked the sheer descent of the precipice—that was a mere picturesque accident in the construction of St. Pagans, but Mr. Marsh read something in Lord Ulswater's face that made his own pseudo-courage wane as fast as that of Bob Acres himself.

"I beg pardon. On my soul, my Lord, I crave you to excuse me," he faltered out.

Lord Ulswater kept his eyes firmly upon the

cowering creature, as a beast-tamer watches some brute at once treacherous and cowardly. "We have been together now for some time," he said gravely, "and Lady Harriet will wonder at the length of an interview that seems without motive. You should not have come here; but as you have done so, be good enough to state your business in as few words as you can."

"It's all up with me at Shellton; I don't make as much as would buy the corks of my physic-bottles. There'll be an execution in my house next week," said Mr. Marsh. "I want to get away."

"You want to get away? Where do you mean to go?" demanded Lord Ulswater.

"To London.—You stare, my Lord, but why not? You know as well as I do that I'm not a bad doctor. I could take out my diploma of M.D. to-morrow from the German university where I studied. I could feel pulses, and look solemn, and whisk from door to door in my brougham, and tell the newest scandal to dowagers, just as well as many a fashionable physician I could name. I'd pitch the brandy-

bottle out of window—indeed, indeed I would, and live like a respectable man, and——”

“And die a court-physician, and a baronet to boot, I suppose,” said Lord Ulswater very quietly; “but broughams, and Belgravian houses, and men-servants, and the rest of it cost money. A good West-end practice costs a great deal of money, I have heard. How shall you manage to get all these things?”

“For that, I look to you, my Lord,” said Mr. Marsh, with a sort of dogged resolution, and repeating each word in the manner of one who is going through a lesson learned by rote. “I have no hope in anything but the generosity of the kind patron who has given me one start in life already. He was Mr. Carnac then, not my Lord, and the six hundred and odd pounds I had from him were more to him, in proportion, than six thousand would be now. Not that I want so much as a gift; it’s only a loan, my Lord. I’ll sign any bond you please, and pay back the money, interest and principal, out of my fees. I should do well in London, really I should, I’ve always hankered after London. You’ve only seen me under a cloud, my Lord, and you

don't know what I should be with a fair field to show my talents in. I should——”

“You must not run on in this way, Marsh,” said Lord Ulswater, rising from his seat. “I am sorry to dash your Alnaschar-like hopes to the ground, but it is best to encourage no idle dreams. It does not suit my views that you should become Sir Stephen Marsh, M.D. of Mayfair; and most certainly I shall not lend you six thousand pounds.”

It is possible that Mr. Marsh had anticipated this refusal, for he evinced none of the ordinary signs of disappointment; he sat quite still, with his gloved hands thrust deep down in his pockets, screwing up his thin-lipped mouth, and eyeing the pattern of the carpet as though he desired to count the threads. “When a man's driven, and goaded, and harassed, there's no saying what he'll do,” observed Mr. Marsh, not menacingly, but rather like one who enunciates a dreary truth—“no saying what he'll do. As well quarry stone on Dartmoor, or pick oakum at Bermuda, as lead this dog's life of skulking and dishonour. And when a man's desperate, he is not always very particular, my Lord, about

who gets dragged down to ruin along with him. That's all I have to say."

"I am glad of that, Marsh—glad, I mean, that you have finished your statement," said Lord Ulswater, as he rang the bell. "I shall say nothing in answer to it at present. The London project is out of the question. If you, on thinking the matter over, decide to emigrate, I may be induced, perhaps, to give you one more chance in a new part of the world. When you see the affair in a proper light, you may address me by letter—till then, good-morning, Mr. Marsh," for the butler had now appeared; and under his custody, so to speak, Mr. Marsh was led away, and safely bestowed in his fly. He heard the gates of St. Pagans close behind him with a dull and heavy clang. He drove back across the smooth green downs, baffled, beaten, and submissive, yet resentful, like a fierce beast that has found its master, yet snarls even as it crouches, and on the first advantage, is ready to turn upon that master, and rend him limb from limb.

CHAPTER X.

SHELLTON MANOR.

THE Right Honourable Robert Drummond Eliot Hastings, a member of the House of Commons, and of the ministry of the day, was not the man to have his house empty. In London, things were different. Mr. and Mrs. Hastings had a good house in Eaton Square, to which they would not have asked any stranger, be he ever so strange to town, and of blood so near akin; but in the country, it was the visitor whose presence conferred a favour, and guests were welcome. Shellton Manor was by no means one of those grand houses where a week's stay is a seven days' Elysium. My Lord Duke can do what Mr. Eliot, with all his parliamentary, official, and social repute, could not do. When you visit his Grace, you may take

your share in the bird-murder of three or four tremendous battues, at which you grow to feel a very butcher among the pheasants, and slay and slay till your shoulder aches with the kicking of the guns that the obsequious keepers load for you. Then the coursing, the amateur theatricals, the ball, the Volunteer fête, the archery, billiards, picnic, rob you of your hours right pleasantly; and there is the noble library to steal any spare time that the gaieties of the day may have spared; but at Shellton Manor it was not so.

Shellton, old as the house itself may have been, was a new place, a made place, one of those mansions around which the fir-trees were all young slips, the gravel too new, the hedges too trim, the meadows too carefully looked to. The demesne was not quite old enough to have attained to those delightful old faults of slovenly copses, patches of rough wood, sheltering rabbits, and bits of rushy ground, fit to harbour snipes, that give half their charm to the home-farm of an ordinary squire. Then the gardens, had Sir Joseph himself been their manager, could not have been expected to be as

rich in leaf and flower, in blossom and fruit, as the more comfortable inland gardens out of reach of the salt breeze of the sea-coast. Mr. Hastings, though he was liberal, and even lavish, with respect to what he called his preserves, could not offer to young men any shooting that of itself would be any inducement to sojourn at Shellton. An average country gentleman, dwelling within a fifty-miles' radius of the great Babel, is apt to compute that every pheasant costs him, in barley, watchers, keepers, and abatement of rent, a guinea. But it was pretty well known that the birds of the Right Honourable Robert cost him a great deal more than a guinea for every long-tailed flutterer that was laid bleeding on the grass ; and accordingly, considerate guests were chary of slaughtering too many of the Shellton pheasants, as they would have been reluctant to drink too deeply of some costly cabinet wine, ruinous to the owner.

But still, though there was lacking the quasi-feudal state and splendour of some ducal castles and some baronial mansions, though in large-handed hospitality it was surpassed by the plain red-brick Hall of many an untitled country

gentleman, still Shellton Manor was rarely without guests; and it was held an honour to be asked there. The perfume of office, the mystic odour of power, privilege, and patronage, hung about the place. Young men, quite eligible on the score of birth, dress, and culture, to be Fellows of All Souls College, were eager for an invitation to that gray stone house, where bachelor inmates slept in attics and turret chambers, where the cook was a dull copyist, the stables meagrely supplied, and the host at once cross and pompous. There were pleasanter mansions strewn broadcast over Britain; but there were only some half-dozen houses which, like Shellton Manor, were haunted by the brownie of place and power.

It may be added, that there were not many English homes in which it was possible to have the privilege—for a privilege it was—of being domiciled under the same roof with so beautiful a girl as Flora Hastings. Those who spent, it may be, but a poor three days at Shellton, were yet able to regard themselves, and to be regarded by others, as enviable mortals and persons of distinction, on the strength of this

brief proximity to the Right Honourable Robert's lovely daughter. A young dandy of the third or fourth degree of magnitude often swelled into a star of the first order, temporarily, from being able to talk with studiously careless familiarity of "Miss Hastings—pretty Flora Hastings—most beautiful creature in England—know her people quite well—staying there, at Shellton, last August!" For London had agreed that Flora Hastings was chief belle of her second London season.

The girl was really of a rare beauty, one of those sweet, graceful maidens who form the component parts of the Dream of Fair Women. It was difficult to imagine the existence of such as Flora Hastings apart from the accessories of her life, away from pretty rooms, rich furniture, elegant trifles, and a life of ease and chastened luxury. There are styles of beauty which, like hardy garden-flowers, can thrive at the door of a cottage as well as in the sheltered precincts of abundance. There are yet other styles of beauty that seem to flourish the more vigorously beneath the low roof of the gipsy tent, or beside the camp-fire of the savage, as the harebell is never so fair, and the wild strawberry never so coyly

tempting, as far away among the wood and the moorland. But Miss Hastings was more like a hothouse flower, that might, perhaps, have its native home in some sun-kissed island of the tropics, but that needed care in our rougher regions, to keep its dainty petals and glossy stem from nipping frost and rude gale.

It was some praise, and just praise, when those who were learned in such matters said, that of the two or three reigning belles of the hot, hard, grinding season, Flora Hastings was the only one that was not spoiled by the honours that polite London had chosen to thrust upon her. She had come down to Shellton with a good grace, and that good feeling of which a good grace is merely the varnish or counterfeit, in the very glow and triumph of her success. It was as if some conqueror of the grand man-slaying days of heathen Rome had been stopped in his pageant, checked on his way through shouting myriads towards the Capitol, and bidden to leave the laurels and the high chariot, the pomp and the pride of the hour, to carry out some homely mission of common-place, every-day duty. To go down to Shellton, while London

was at the high-water of fashion and display, to nurse an old gentleman suffering from gout, and in the temper that generally accompanies gout, was a trial that might have tested the quality of the most Patient Griselda of the nineteenth century.

Miss Hastings, however, was far from laying claim to a Griselda's equanimity under annoyance; she was merely a good girl, with a liking for admiration and amusement, which good girls sometimes possess; and with a sincere affection for the old father whose unlucky illness had put an end to her town-glories. To leave London, no doubt was disagreeable, but she did leave it with a generous willingness that was worth the mechanical compliance of a score of such passive victims as the great proverbial prototype of obedient females.

There were those who remarked, that the sacrifice which Miss Hastings made was, after all, a very trifling one, since she was notoriously engaged to be married to William Morgan, Esquire, of Cramlingham and Stoneham Halls, as well as of various other seats in England and Wales, and especially in Wales, the jawbreaking

names of which latter mansions need not be enumerated for a second time in this history. A great match and a great catch—so the gossips in turbans avowed, somewhat enviously, with the entire concurrence of the bewigged old gentlemen who fill the bay-windows of the clubs. It was a match that the daughter of any of those dukes and earls, to count cousinship with whom had been the Right Honourable Robert's earliest and most solid claim to office, might have been glad to make, in a worldly point of view, of course—strictly in a worldly point of view.

That Flora Hastings was especially lucky, unnaturally, undeservedly, preposterously lucky, in having secured this golden prize in the lottery matrimonial, many envious tongues declared. But she was envied less for her supposed good-fortune, than perhaps any of her contemporaries would have been, and she was hated not at all. Mrs. Hastings it was who incurred the familiar reproach of being mercenary, designing, and so on ; and she, like a tough-hearted woman of the world, distressed herself very little about the murmurs of those dear friends who found it hard to forgive her such a great success.

Of Mrs. Hastings, there is not much to be said. Of the world, worldly, she was yet a woman to be respected for her conduct in every relation of life. She did her duty as a wife, as a mother, and as a member of society, working stoutly and faithfully, according to the faith that was in her, to promote the social and political prosperity of her husband and her children. To the Right Honourable Robert, she was an invaluable partner in life, patiently and steadfastly labouring to keep the wives of the more influential statesmen of his party in good-humour, doing the honours of his house graciously, and offending no one who might by possibility be useful to the government. Her son found in her the kindest of confidantes; and it was due to her diplomacy that the debts of that young gentleman, now Secretary of Legation at some minor German court, had been three times paid by his growling father. She had displayed great tact and delicacy in the Morgan affair—neither scaring away the fish by too much eagerness, nor pressing upon Flora any gratuitous advice; and she was now serenely sure of having provided for her daughter's life-long happiness by

the engagement she had so dexterously contrived.

So the Hastings family were at home under their picturesque roof of Shellton, and they had, in spite of the concurrence of the London season, plenty of guests of both sexes, highly creditable friends, well-born and well-mannered, but belonging to that section of Society that rather rubs shoulders with the rose than lays just claim to be the rose itself. It was hardly possible, indeed, that any one who had a real share in the political life that is, after all, the tonic and stimulant of our old-world system, and who had not the gout, should desert the great parliamentary arena, where swords and shields were still rattling, and where the war-cries of party-leaders resounded yet over the struggling throng of intellectual gladiators. Nor could great ladies, whose receptions were trumpeted forth by the fashionable press months beforehand, desert their stifling drawing-rooms and operaboxes to rusticate at Shellton. But there were two or three married couples, cadets of noble houses, who were scarcely sorry to curtail the campaign in Curzon Street, or elsewhere, after

spending half a year's income in three months as a holocaust on Fashion's altar; and there were agreeable young-lady cousins from distant parts of England; and younger sons, with the true Pall Mall flavour about their yellow whiskers or trim moustaches, from the Clubs and the Household Brigade.

Among these gentlemen, but hardly of them, was the son-in-law-elect, William Morgan, who resided, as a son-in-law-elect should do, according to antique custom, not at the manor-house, but at the *Regent Hotel*, in the pleasant bathing-place called Shellton-on-Sea. This young man's position was not very easily defined. He was at once above and below those with whom he daily associated. In right of his wealth, he was a person of very considerable importance. The ball lay at his foot, so to speak, awaiting till it should be his good pleasure to kick it to the goal. In the greatness of his means, he had a golden key, that in a bold and dexterous hand would unlock the enchanted portals of Fame's temple. He was so rich, that if he would but condescend to be clever, industrious, and decorous as to his way of living and opinions, men were

willing that he should rule over them ; taking in his early manhood such a share in the governing of the nation, as far abler men, after years of pain and toil, can only attain when their temples are getting bare, and their locks grizzled. Power, renown, rank, and the sweets of office, might be William Morgan's, on very easy terms indeed, supposing him to deserve them, so marvellously had his way in life been smoothed by the vast wealth that his sturdy parent had bequeathed to him.

But there was a reverse to the medal. The very dandies and loungers who envied this fortunate young man his dazzling prosperity, and spoke with an enforced respect of his wealth, despised the man himself. Nor was this wholly on account of the lowness of his origin. They would not have looked with the same eyes upon old Morgan himself, the hero of the pickaxe and the fustian vest, who had fought his way to opulence. That ex-miner, ex-navigator, ex-subcontractor, and late millionaire, had been a very rugged diamond indeed, but hard and keen, as a diamond should be. His manners had been coarse, his bearing boisterous, and his language

Bœotian in its uncouth rusticity ; but he was emphatically a man, and his manliness saved him from contempt. You may dislike, but you cannot despise, the most savage soldier who bears the reeking stains of war upon him, and who comes before you, gashed and gory, with the blood of his enemies mingled with his own. So William Morgan's father would, by the curled darlings of England, have been set down as a splendid old ruffian ; a person to be avoided as much as might be, but highly respectable after his fashion, as a grisly bear is respectable after his.

But the old man was dead, sleeping, in the body, under half-a-dozen tons of Carrara marble in Cramlingham parish church, and it was William his son who reigned in his stead. By what strange law of Nature is it that as the son of a great statesmen, or poet, or warrior, is commonly a fool, or at best a washed-out copy of his progenitor, the heir of a self-made man is almost always deficient in the pith and vigour that marked his hard-working sire ? At any rate, William Morgan's was a case in point. He had several good qualities—was painstaking,

well-meaning, and truthful, as well as wonderfully modest for so rich a youth, who had heard, from his boyhood up, in as strong and boastful words as old Mr. Morgan could employ, that "money made the man." To say that the present possessor of Stoneham, Cramlingham, and the other manors, to say nothing of scrip, stock, shares, and mines in nearly every quarter of the world, bore his golden burden gracefully, would be untrue, but at least he was not liable to be taxed with vulgar arrogance.

He was painfully gentlemanly, one of those men who look upon gentlemanhood as an art to be acquired by long and severe study, and who suffer tortures of shame if they imagine themselves to have transgressed a canon of etiquette. His fellow-Etonians had, with the quick instinct that belongs to boys, found out this foible of William Morgan's, and had bantered him and jeered him in the merciless manner peculiar to school-boys and school-girls. At Oxford, the future lord of lands had worn a velvet cap, and his full purse had in a measure begun to be a barrier between the rude outer world and his own shrinking, serious, sensitive nature. The

undergraduates of his time had not the heart to be very hard upon so openhanded, inoffensive, kindly a young fellow, and if they laughed at him, laughed when his back was turned. But here was some truth in the account that had been given of him by Laxington of the Eleusis Club. He had tried to take an interest in the pursuits that usually interest men of his age, and of the class in which he was tolerated rather than welcomed. His yacht, his racing-stable, his hunters, his Highland moor, were a weariness to their owner, yet he kept them up in liberal style. He was now about to enter upon political life—and matrimony. Such was the Right Honourable Robert's son-in-law expectant, who now walked, with slow steps, between the steep banks that skirted the road from the watering-place to Shellton Manor, on a fine July morning

CHAPTER XI.

ON THE LAWN.

ALTHOUGH the morning was a July morning, the month was still young; and as William Morgan made his tardy way between the hedge-rows that bounded what was called the Manor Road, there was a freshness in the verdure, and an elasticity in the air, that might in vain be sought for when the sultry season should be further advanced. The sky was of a bright blue, mottled by whole caravans of fleecy-white clouds; the delicate blush of the wild-rose varied the green of the quickset here and there; and there was dew yet sparkling on the cob-webs, that glittered as they spanned the grass in shaded spots. It was one of those phases of weather that show the English climate, and the soft English scenery of low hill and woodland,

of dell, and dingle, and brooklet, to the greatest advantage.

But the beauty of the day was lost upon William Morgan. He paced on, slow and thoughtful, and gave not a glance to the smile of the sunny morning, or ever noted the wild-flowers peeping coyly out from the hollows and brushwood of the banks, that rose steeply on either hand. There was a faint, a very faint resemblance between the young man and his invalid sister, such a likeness as occasionally exists between a very beautiful and a very ugly person, knit together by the ties of blood. Not that Fortunatus Morgan—that was the nickname, of Etonian device originally, which the mild satirists of Pall Mall had chosen to apply to the future legislator—not that Fortunatus Morgan was ugly. Pale, middle-sized, and with a small and regular set of features, with auburn hair, and a weak little auburn moustache shading his upper lip, he was rather good-looking than the reverse; precisely the sort of man to pass muster in a crowd, and to attract scanty notice. His gray eyes, indeed, had at times a look that was pensive, and almost wistful, a look

that reminded those who knew Ruth Morgan of the sad, eager, spiritual light that shone in the eyes of the dying sister, who loved her brother with an unselfish devotion which seemed the only link binding her to earth. But Ruth's eyes were blue, not gray, and they were far larger than her brother's, and met the gaze of others more frankly.

There really do seem to be natures on which no amount of worldly prosperity can confer pleasure, just as there are others that cannot be made miserable by all the sufferings of Job. Here, for instance, was the young master of enormous wealth, one whose name was a proverb for good-luck, on whom it seemed as if Fortune had poured forth with large liberality the stores of her cornucopia, and yet discontent sat upon his brow, and he looked as moody—allowance being made for a difference in intellectual calibre—as Hamlet the Dane. Great riches were his, great power for good or ill, fair day-dreams of ambition, sweet prospects of domestic joy, and yet he was sad, and almost sullen, as he walked along the familiar road that led to the house where his affianced bride dwelt.

The pains that lovers feel, or, at any rate, the description of them, are somewhat out of date in modern days. It was different once. The wits, the poets, the fine gentlemen, the cavaliers and bloods of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, made no secret of the martyrdom which the caprice or coldness of some cruel fair one caused them to endure. Torments, tortures, flames, rages, furies, were the mildest expressions in the rhymes that bewailed the perfidy or the sternness of a mistress. Fickle Fanny, stony-hearted Belinda, perjured Araminta, were roundly rated in good rattling Alexandrines for their barbarity, and seldom escaped a score or so of poetically abusive epithets. The jilted lover, the snubbed swain, the victims of feminine harshness or treachery, roared out their complaints to the world, and told all who cared to read their couplets, how they languished, drooped, pined, burned, writhed, and died.

We have changed all that. A gentleman would be ashamed to drop into the smoking-room of his club and pass a copy of verses bewailing his hard fate from hand to hand, or

possibly to permit some friend to read aloud to the sympathetic audience a half-dozen of stanzas impugning the cruelty of Chloe, or invoking curses on mercenary Lavinia, as was the mode at Will's or the Cocoa Tree, when coffee-houses were. But it does not follow, because the wounded bleed inwardly, and suffer in silence, that the darts of nineteenth-century Pentheseileas lack point or barb. The successful suitor for the hand of Flora Hastings was not happy. He had not been rejected, and certainly he had no broken vows to complain of, like the gold-laced and beruffled beaux who penned heroics and Sapphic odes to the fair disturbers of their peace. But—— Yes, in these ill-assorted marriages there always is a “but,” more or less portentous. The sting goes with the honey, the thorn with the flower. Some are too dull to perceive it, and go through life in an oxlike sort of sluggish contentment. Some, whose senses are a little more acute, dimly perceive that all is not well, and that the blessing of even a bishop cannot secure bliss to those who are mated, but not matched. Others, again, struggle and rebel against the chain that their

own act has riveted, and either endure the galling of the fetters, or rend and bruise their flesh most cruelly in the unhallowed effort to break away from them.

In William Morgan's case, there was a "but," though he was luckier than some men and women, in that the doubt and dread had come to him before, instead of after marriage. Not that he doubted his own love for Miss Hastings; he was sure, too sure of that. He had never been really in love before: his was rather a cold nature, shy, distrustful, secretive, and it was new to him to feel how very closely the thought and memory of a fair girl's bright face had come to be tangled with his heartstrings.

He was almost afraid of the depth and force of his own passion, more resembling the old divine frenzy that inspired heathen heroes of old, than the modern mawkish preference for "a nice girl," a "pretty little party," which is the utmost to which the stoical swell of our epoch will confess. He felt as if he were playing too high, felt as a gambler might feel, who, in the fever of his heated blood, had set his all upon one cast of a die, or one turn of a card,

and must be a beggar if he lost. He was well-nigh angry with himself for loving Flora Hastings so very sincerely and engrossingly as he did love her. How if she died—she without whom it now seemed impossible that he should live, at least that he should live any life tinged by joy and hope? How if she should quarrel with him—become estranged from him, give her affections, if not her hand, to some other man, and leave him lonely and bankrupt in that without which his money was but dross to him?

Perhaps he had some imperfect consciousness that this match, on which he had set his heart, and in which his dearest hopes were centred, was a faulty one at best. Perhaps he suspected, rather than knew, that he, William Morgan, was not fit to be the companion, guide, counsellor, and truest friend, through the difficult journey of life, for a clever, warm-hearted, and imaginative girl like Flora Hastings. Possibly, he had some sort of dim perception of the fact that, whether or no she loved him now, her acceptance of his proposals had been rather prompted by a desire to please her parents, than by any preference for himself;

and it did occur to him, once and again, with the pertinacity of a haunting ghost, that the absence of any genuine sympathy between two persons who were to be linked together by bonds that only sin or death could break, augured but ill for their future happiness in wedded life. But he drove the thought from him as an exorcist might have banished a rebel spirit. She was too beautiful, and sweet, and noble, to be renounced. He loved her too dearly to take counsel of his prudence, where she was in question.

Musing thus, the accepted suitor pursued his way until the bright gravel of the drive that swept, yellow and glistening, past the deep porch of the manor-house, crackled beneath his tread. He was going up to the door as usual, when the well-known tap-tapping of a hardwood croquet mallet upon a hardwood croquet ball, accompanied by the silvery sound of merry girlish laughter, fell upon his ear. He looked round towards the garden, caught a glimpse of waving hat-feathers and muslin skirts gleaming and fluttering through the dark screen of trees that belted in the greensward, and after a moment's

hesitation, he turned towards the quarter whence the sounds proceeded, opened a low iron gate, and passed on beside the flower-beds to the broad lawn.

The group of young ladies and of young men, visitors at Shellton Manor, some of whom were playing croquet while the others looked on, was a merry group enough: indeed, young people, well to do in the world, and on terms of that comfortable intimacy with one another which comes from living together under the hospitable roof of the same country-house, must be very much to be pitied if they cannot pass the rosy hours agreeably. The weather was delicious. Shellton was, of its kind, a pleasant house wherein to sojourn. The Right Honourable Robert growled a little now and then, but gouty men, and notably cabinet ministers, are privileged to exhibit a modicum of ill-humour when the fiend of Podagra is busy with their feet and ankles; and Mrs. Hastings was just what the mistress of a mansion should be. It was all very nice; the guests had not been together long enough to tire of their company, but had had time to thaw into genial good-humour; and croquet, if rather a

dull game to some fancies, lends itself to flirtation better even than the archery it has supplanted. Archery had its merits, no doubt; the attitudes that belonged to the bow-maiden's art set off a graceful figure in great perfection; the uniform was often a becoming one, and there was room for a display of nerve and skill; but then it is not every one who possesses a graceful figure, or who can hit bulls-eyes, and win golden arrows; whereas the stupidest girl alive can play croquet—so can the wittiest and the prettiest. The game, therefore, is deservedly popular.

Some of the youthful guests at Shellton, then, were contending in the strife of coloured balls and iron arches, and the others were chatting and watching them, lazy, but well amused. The country-bred girls, really fond of croquet, and accustomed to it, were of course the most skilful and eager of the players, and the simple enthusiasm with which they disputed about those recondite rules of "roqueting," turning back, and so on, regarding which books have been written, was very wonderful and refreshing to the hackneyed London men to whom they were teaching the game. Flora Hastings, with a

mallet in her hand, stood among the others like a tall lily among hardy blooming roses. The paleness that is the inevitable result of late hours and hot rooms, had not yet been conquered by the fresh air of the country; but she looked gloriously beautiful, with her golden hair and pure delicacy of complexion, with blue eyes that were at once bright and thoughtful, as noble a girl as any in broad England.

So now William Morgan comes in sight, and as he is perceived, a sort of chill seems to fall upon the blithe party, as if he brought a cold atmosphere along with him. They all greeted him, of course, and appeared glad to see him, as decency required, but he threw a damp upon their spirits, somehow, and they were more artificially polite, less heartily good-natured, from the moment that he came among them. It might have been remarked that no one seemed to be on familiar terms with the new-comer, not even Flora Hastings; she gave him her hand very frankly indeed, more frankly, perhaps, than he liked, for he would have preferred a little less of sisterly simplicity in her reception of him; she said a few words of kindly common-

place, to which he made answer awkwardly enough; then he stood still, moodily watching the game.

It is strange, sometimes, to observe that one member of a company seems to be parted from the rest by some invisible barrier that cannot be broken through. Such a viewless wall existed, in this instance, between William Morgan and the guests at the manor-house, or, at any rate, the younger among them. It was not one of those customary and recognised fences by which the highly complicated society of a country like our own is intersected. It was not the boundary-hedge, for example, that might, by a bold metaphor, be supposed to exist between Belgravia and Bloomsbury, or to screen Mayfair from the incursions of Finsbury. The man who was to marry Miss Hastings was not likely to offend against the Graces. Etonians, gentlemen-commoners of Oxford, cannot well be otherwise than persons of good breeding, unperplexed by aspirates, accurate in dress and deportment. William Morgan, quiet and unassuming, was as much unlike the popular type of the blatant parvenu Cræsus as any man could be, and yet no one

ever could "get on with him," as the phrase is. The male visitors at Shellton treated him with what the French call high consideration, but there was a reserve that could never be got over. The young-lady guests did not like him; they were half afraid of him, having heard accounts of his wonderful wealth and prospects, until they esteemed him a sort of stray prince from the *Arabian Nights*; but they did not much admire the prince personally.

The game went on, but not with the old zest. The rosy-cheeked, honest-eyed girls from Cheshire or Somersetshire began to find, they hardly knew why, that the fun of croquet was over. They did not prattle or laugh so merrily as before, nor did their cavaliers encourage them by saying such amusing things, or by making such delightfully provoking blunders in the mimic warfare, as had been the case before Morgan's arrival. If the young master of vast riches had been the Fay Morgan, his namesake, he could hardly have thrown a greater gloom over the good meeting by ever so threatening an apparition in griffin-drawn chariot. The mallets went tap, tap, like so many woodpeckers,

and the balls were driven through the arches with exemplary precision, but the croquet might as well, so far as conversation went, have been carried on by a select assemblage of Quakers.

"Suppose we leave off: the sun is coming round to this side of the lawn, and every one seems tired of the game," said Miss Hastings at last; and the mallets were idle in a moment. Every one was glad to leave off.

"You seemed to enjoy the game half an hour ago, or at least I fancied you did," said William Morgan peevishly. A kill-joy's temper is not always improved by the perception that he is a kill-joy.

"Well, but one may have enough even of a good thing, you know," remarked jolly Captain Crashaw of the Blues.—"Don't you think so, Miss Warburton?"

Miss Warburton did think so; and as several voices affirmed the applicability of Crashaw's maxim to this particular case, the hammers and balls were discarded, and a move towards the house seemed imminent, when two new personages came upon the scene—Mrs. Hastings and Lord Ulswater. They came over the velvet-

smooth lawn from the house, smiling and talking. Mrs. Hastings, gracious to all within the charmed circle of her intimate acquaintances, was doubly gracious to Lord Ulswater; perhaps in remembrance that her own race was near akin to the Carnacs, perhaps in the vague hope of winning over an Opposition champion. William Morgan, gnawing his lip, a little apart from the rest, envied the ease of the late comer's bearing. Lord Ulswater's manners had nothing affected—nothing that savoured of the late Sir Charles Grandison; and yet their very simplicity was full of grace. Even so poor an act of courtesy as that which the new arrival performed by lifting his hat, seemed to be more expressive, in his case, of a chivalrous deference towards the sex whose presence claimed this homage, than others could impart to it. The sunlight glinted on the tawny gold of the young lord's clustering hair, as his handsome head towered above the group which he was approaching.

Lord Ulswater was one of those men, rare everywhere, but especially scarce in England, whose apparently unstudied ease of deportment relieves the habitual awkwardness of their com-

panions. Most of our countrymen are painfully alive to a tormenting fear of ridicule, and remain on the defensive, tightly braced up in a sort of moral buckram suit, like some sixteenth-century knight, hardly able to waddle in the heavy plate armour that made him invulnerable and helpless. And yet the rising orator, whose name the newspapers were busy with, said nothing that any of his brother Eleusinians might not have said, so far as the words went. He was not in the least eloquent or witty ; but very common-place sentences, spoken as Lord Ulswater spoke them, were apt to ring musically in a lady's ear. He was, he said, an unconscionably early visitor, but he had been anxious to find his neighbours at home, and had ridden over the downs at this Gothic hour to avoid the empty ceremony of card-leaving later in the day. He was so glad to hear that Mr. Hastings was getting the better of his old enemy the gout ; and yet he had a selfish interest in the gout's tardy retreat, inasmuch as it secured the stay of his friends in the vicinity of the Abbey, where he himself really thought he should remain for some weeks, unless Lady Harriet should turn him out. Lady

Harriet, as Lord Ulswater had been telling Mrs. Hastings a moment before, sent all sorts of kind messages, and was very soon coming over to the Manor. He hoped that the inmates of Shellton would not be afraid of his aunt's haunted house; they might perhaps be tempted by the fine weather to venture so far. Lady Harriet would scream at the notion of a ball or a drum, but a sort of fête or picnic in the ruins, he thought, would be rather good fun. The croquet was over before he came; what a pity! That was all he said to Miss Hastings; and then he turned to talk with the four or five men whom he knew more or less, and shook hands very cordially with the son-in-law elect, and was delighted to make the acquaintance of the rosy young ladies from distant counties, and altogether was a very pleasant specimen of the morning caller.

William Morgan, sulking in the shadow of the rhododendron clump, like Achilles in his tent, viewed Lord Ulswater with gloomy eyes. He had always been well enough treated by the chief of the Carnacs; knew no ill of him, and certainly had no just grounds for any jealousy with reference to Lord Ulswater and beautiful Flora

Hastings. He told himself, angrily, that he was not jealous ; but he wished this dreadfully handsome, dangerously well-spoken young patrician twelve thousand miles away in New Zealand, or twelve feet below the pavement of the chapel at St. Pagans, or anywhere, so that he were not bending his proud head before Flora Hastings, and looking with his dark-blue eyes into hers. And yet, what, in the name of common sense, had occurred to make the most petulant of betrothed suitors out of temper? A gentleman had called at a country-house, and the mistress of it having brought him to join a knot of croquet-players on the lawn, he had said a few words, as politeness required, to the young lady her daughter ; that was all. There was absolutely nothing whereat to take umbrage. Othello himself would scarcely have objected to Lieutenant Cassio's paying that much attention to Madame Desdemona. But——

It was the miserable fate of this fortune's favourite to find a "but" always rankling in his secret soul. He declared that he was not angry with Lord Ulswater, but he confessed to his own heart that he was—not angry, of course—but

vexed, with Flora. Why did her eyes fall timidly to the ground, for one fleeting instant, before the visitor's eyes? Why did she start, very slightly, but perceptibly, when first she caught sight of the tall figure at her mother's side? And why was there that tell-tale flutter, that sudden flush of dainty rose-pink in her cheek, pale till then, a flush that passed away as quickly as it came? And, above all, why was there that momentary hesitation in giving Lord Ulswater her hand? She had given her hand to him, William Morgan, her affianced husband, simply and readily enough, some half-hour ago—too simply, too readily, he thought, in the bitterness of his spirit; and there had been none of these flattering signs of emotion that the betrothed lover fancied he had detected in the greeting given to Lord Ulswater.

If this were so, had he not a right to be vexed, nay, to be more than vexed? Surely, he who was to be this girl's husband should be an object of greater interest in her eyes than any mere acquaintance, whatever his rank or his personal merits. It was gall and wormwood to him to dwell upon these things, and he began to comfort

himself on account of his great need for comfort. After all, perhaps he was mistaken. Then he set to work to prove to himself the error into which he had fallen.

The case for the defence was plausible, and in accordance with the wishes of the judge self-appointed to try the fault or innocence of Flora. The start, and flush, and flutter, the fact that the girl had faltered as she extended her hand to Lord Ulswater, had been so very slight and brief, that no one less lynx-eyed than a jealous lover could have espied them. They might have been imaginary, or, at any rate, the beholder might have exaggerated them for his own self-torment. Admitting that such marks of agitation had had any real existence, how harsh was it to blame one of the age of Miss Hastings for trifling tokens of an embarrassment which by no means implied a preference for the cause of it ! The visitor was a man of note, a recent celebrity, whose fame was bruited by a flourish of political trumpets ; just the sort of brilliant person that young ladies look up to with that tendency to hero-worship which sits so prettily upon their impressionable sex. Lord

Ulswater had been quite unconscious, and so, evidently, had been shrewd, worldly Mrs. Hastings and the loungers around. A verdict of "Not guilty," or, at any rate, of "Not proven," was returned in William Morgan's unseen court for the trial of his future wife.

In spite of this acquittal, the accepted suitor found himself narrowly watching the conduct of Miss Hastings and of Lord Ulswater during the remainder of the latter's somewhat protracted visit. But there really was nothing whereat the séverest duenna of Spanish domestic life would have had a right to cavil. Lord Ulswater was pressed to stay for lunch, and he stayed. Finally, when the pony-carriages and the saddle-horses, and the big barouche for the non-riding or driving matrons of the party, came round to the door, and there was a dispersal of the guests towards two or three places of local interest, from the Marine Parade of Shellton-on-Sea to the ruins of Capel Castle, Lord Ulswater rode with one of the detachments just so far, and no further, as their roads lay together. It certainly was the case that Miss Hastings was one of this detachment, and Lord Ulswater as certainly

rode at her side for some portion of the way; but he was, to all appearance, just as attentive to Miss Warburton or to Mrs. Heneage, as to the queen of the London season. Nothing occurred to confirm William Morgan's suspicions; suspicions which, as he somewhat ostentatiously told himself, he had laid at rest for ever. And yet, if the dandies and damsels among whom he cantered on that day could have read the real feelings of him whom they called behind his back by the half-envious nickname of Fortunatus Morgan, no one of them, not even Crashaw of the Blues, who was head over ears in debt, would have been willing to change places with the Cræsus of Cramlingham. This young man, outwardly so cold and unattractive, loved Flora Hastings so deeply and desperately, that the thought of losing her gave him exquisite pain. He scented the coming peril afar off, and knew, as by some instinct, not to be lulled to sleep, that the great sorrow of his life was at hand.

CHAPTER XII.

A LINK IN THE CHAIN.

MR. HACKETT, M.P., who was at that time the very efficient and experienced Treasury whip, to whose vigilance and firmness the government owed many a victory in the lobby of the House of Commons, was by far too great a man, in a general way, to fetch and carry between ministers at their posts in London, and ministers leg-tied by gout at country-houses. And, no doubt, under ordinary circumstances, the premier would have sent his private secretary, or even have written by the post, to his absent colleague at Shellton. But Mr. Hackett was a personal friend to the Right Honourable Robert, and he had a considerable interest in the matter in question; so he took advantage of a blank day in parliament, and came down to Shellton with a return-ticket.

"So you see, don't you, that Morgan has no time to lose," urged Mr. Hackett, after briefly explaining the reason of his flying visit. "Seymour's a dead man; seizure came on at Wildbad: his doctor—he always travels with a doctor—telegraphed the news. Question of hours or days, but recovery impossible. Morgan ought to begin canvassing the county at once."

"Umph!" grunted the statesman, crumpling up a great official red-sealed letter, one of many that lay on the table, between his fingers. "Ah! confound it! there it is again. Pinches my left ankle, Hackett, as a crab might do. You can't form any idea of what it is; no one can."

It was one of the Right Honourable Robert's "bad" days. The gout was on the alert to maintain its empire. The fiend Podagra, ceasing to be a quiescent fiend, that contented itself with a spasmodic pinch at intervals, was briskly nipping its prey, and the minister's temper was none the better for the fact. Mr. Hackett's plastic countenance assumed a sympathetic expression. "I dare say not," he said very blandly. "Have you tried colchicum?"

“Have I tried fiddlesticks!” snapped Mr. Hastings, very rudely, it must be owned, but then there is no pleasing a man with the gout. If you suggest nothing for the sufferer’s relief, it is obvious to his Podagra-ridden fancy that you do not care for his affliction; but if you do venture on advice, your advice is almost certain to be flung in your teeth. As for colchicum, that well-known and antique remedy was the Right Honourable Robert’s sheet-anchor, though it often failed to soothe his pangs; but he resented the mention of it now as cordially as if Mr. Hackett had ventured on a playful adaptation of popular inquiry as to the minister’s poor feet.

The suavity of the Treasury whip was unruffled. “Ah!” he said, “it suits some constitutions wonderfully well. Hendon and Pashleigh, and one or two more men of our time of life, swear by colchicum still. It may be abused, of course, but so may anything else.”

This little speech mollified Mr. Hastings somewhat. Lord Hendon and Sir Edmund Pashleigh were his juniors, as he well knew, and certainly Mr. Hackett was a younger man by a

good five years, and yet the four were calmly set down as contemporaries. Gentlemen of the years to which the Right Honourable Robert had attained are apt to be nearly as touchy and tenacious on the subject of their age as ladies of a similar standing; and there was an implied compliment in the visitor's words that produced a lenitive effect on the minister's nerves.

"I know one thing," said the master of Shell-ton, half apologetically, "and that is, that gout makes one into a bear—unfit to talk to any one but a good-tempered fellow like you, Hackett.—About Morgan, though, do you think there's any necessity for hurrying matters? If the agent——"

"No, no; nothing like a personal canvass: you have no idea how touchy they are down there," earnestly interrupted Mr. Hackett. "The Conflagrative have got half a dozen men fighting to be put up for such a chance as that, and lots of money ready; all the Bosworth interest against us too, remember; and there are dozens of country gentlemen who won't help us, for fear of offending the Duke. Our only chance is for Morgan to take the field at once; and

Sharples, the agent, is off already to arrange with the local fellows about public meetings, addresses, and the rest of it. I don't know what sort of a speaker our young friend may be——"

"And I'm sure I don't, but I should say an infernally bad one," interjected the future father-in-law of the young gentleman alluded to, sorely spurred by the red-hot fingers of his familiar fiend.

"But it does not signify in the least," coolly went on Mr. Hackett. "He can read, I presume; and whether his speech is in his hat or in his head, matters very little, so that he talks. He'll have to speechify at town-halls, agricultural banquets, mechanics' institutes, and so on. Then he must canvass, and subscribe to everything local—from the repairs of a church-tower to a thatcher's family of fourteen children—and Sharples will manage the rest."

Mr. Hastings meditated for a few moments, frowning at his own thoughts. "All this will take time, won't it? The young man may be kept at this work all the rest of the summer or so, it seems to me," said he dubiously.

The county which Fortunatus Morgan aspired to represent was at some distance from that in which Shellton was situated. Youths of vast wealth and great prospects coming into counties on such an errand, and backed by a powerful party, are pretty sure to be caressed, and feasted, and made much of by influential supporters, and may sometimes prove not insensible to the witchery of bright eyes that beam enthusiastically in honour of *their* triumph. Not impossibly, the Right Honourable Robert may have pondered over the risk of letting go so big a fish, meshed, indeed, in the net of matrimony, but not landed; and very probably Mr. Hackett, trained by long practice to read the worldlier thoughts of those with whom he came in contact, knew perfectly well what was passing through the statesman's mind.

"Now, Hastings," said the Ulysses of the Treasury, bending forward and speaking in a low, earnest tone, making use, too, of the familiarity of addressing the minister by his name, without any prefix, a freedom which he allowed himself only once or twice in an interview, on much the same principle which induces

a grandee of Spain to put on his hat before royalty—"now, Hastings, we are old friends, and I want to be useful to you in this matter. We—I and my prime minister, you know—prefer young Morgan to any other man we could start for the county. He's one of those safe, slow young fellows that make the best steady-paced working-members. In fifteen years, or in ten, I dare say he would get his peerage. We would make him a Royal Commissioner of all sorts of things; or even, if he likes to go into red-tape harness, an Under-secretary. But if his leaving Shellton just now interferes with any family arrangements——"

Here the speaker hesitated, but his eyes completed the sentence. The Treasury whip had very expressive eyes, being a little, wiry, black-haired man, with the glance of a hawk. Mr. Hackett was, as his name implied, Irish, but until he grew excited, no one could ever have detected the Milesian raciness in his voice. The Right Honourable Robert took a minute for reflection. "No, no; I suppose he ought to go," said he reluctantly, but deliberately enough. "There is no actual time fixed for the

wedding, and—I suppose Colonel Seymour will not consent to resign?”

Mr. Hackett shook his head. “They cannot ask him,” said he, with a glance at his watch, and another at the ornamental clock on the chimney-piece: “they dare not trouble him on any irritating topic. Till the breath is out of his body—and he may linger long—the poor fellow is member for Oakshire.”

“I see. Morgan must go. I’ll have him in here and talk to him, and put the thing as you put it. And I must say, my dear Hackett, that you have done me a great kindness by coming down in person to explain matters, and to give me a chance of—of—— By the by, you’ll take some lunch, Hackett, if you won’t stay to dinner?” said the master of the house, for already the guest was drawing on his gloves, and preparing to go. This, however, Mr. Hackett declined. At Shellton-on-Sea, he had had his biscuit and glass of sherry—so he said—and that was all he ever took in the middle of the day. His presence was too needful in London for him to dally with the precious hours at Shellton; he must go; and he did go.

Mr. Hackett's musings, as the up-train that bore him back to town flew through the peaceful country, past sleepy hamlets, past ruins of gray old Norman keeps, and among brooks and wooded dells, were not exactly in tune with the soft harmony of rural life. "We want the cub, and we shall have him"—such were the thoughts that chased each other through his subtle brain. "He is one of those thundering rich fellows whom no one can call adventurers: he is not too clever—I hate your clever young M.P.—an edge-tool that cuts one's fingers—and then his borough influence is ours, so long as we keep the peerage dangling before him. But Hastings is wrong not to secure him for his daughter—just as if fifty mouths would not water for such a ripe golden plum as that!"

Meanwhile, the owner of Shellton manor-house sat scowling over his papers. He had a vague sense of having been out-generaled, somehow, by his political colleagues. Fortunatus Morgan he had come to look upon as his own property, a captive to his wife's bow and spear, and whose ransom was to be the wedding-ring destined to encircle the slender finger of Miss

Hastings. It was somewhat provoking that the long-heads of the Treasury benches should have decided on putting forward his elect son-in-law as a candidate for this particular county, and doubly vexatious that the canvass should begin now, instead of at the eve of the dissolution. That would have given reasonable time for the conversion of Flora Hastings into Flora Morgan ; but now to hurry on the wedding was out of the question. No day had been named ; the tardy solicitors had not got beyond the first rough draft of instructions for the settlements ; and wary Mrs. Hastings was averse to pressing her daughter on the subject of the marriage.

And yet, although the Right Honourable Robert was too sound a classical scholar to be unable to quote in its original Latin the line whose English translation tells of the frequency of slips between cup and lip, he could not own his fears. Hackett had shown his accustomed tact and friendliness ; but behind Hackett was the premier, and the head of the cabinet was a man to be obeyed. There was no help for it.

Accordingly a servant was sent to beg that

Mr. Morgan would be so kind as to join his intending father-in-law in the latter's study ; and after a very short interview it was arranged that the rich aspirant for the representation of Oakshire should start for that shire on the very next day.—“ Are going to-morrow ?” said Flora, when he told her the news. “ I am so sorry ; but you must be sure to be back by the fourth of next month—the pic-nic—as they choose to call it—at St. Pagans. It is a promise, mind !”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLACKCAP IS PAID OFF.

THERE was deep truth underlying that bold metaphor, by which the heathen poets of old, Scandinavian and Goth no less than Greek and Roman, described the wondrous way in which the web of human destinies is woven on the Loom of Fate. We need not believe either in Valkyr or in Parcæ, in Lachesis or in Skogula, to feel the force of the grand myth, and the lesson which it imparts. Still, the mystic distaff whirls, heavy with flax fibres, still the threads when spun are woven into warp and woof by the fast-flying shuttle, and still the fabric grows, and the shears resound, and our lives are measured and meted till it comes to our turn for the touch of the resistless steel.

To the imagination of a modern, at least, the

most remarkable feature of the arrangement is the immense variety of the sources whence are drawn the materials for the Great Web. Threads the most unlike, the furthest apart, are caught up, spun, and twined, and crossed, and knit up into the giant fabric. Existences that would seem to have nothing in common, yet prove, on a close inspection, to have been joined to one another by the viewless but unbroken chain of cause and effect. There lives no creature of whom we can say with truth, that with him or her we can by no possibility have to do, that by no indirect agency can he or she influence us for weal or woe. There are bonds and links between all human actions, and all human destinies.

At much the same hour at which William Morgan, Esquire, of Cramlingham and Stoneham, and many a fair Hall besides, alighted from the railway carriage upon the platform at Bridchester, that cathedral city of Oakshire where his canvassing was to begin, and where the obsequious Mr. Sharples was ready to receive his paymaster, a homeward-bound Australian clipper came to her moorings in the Thames. The steam-tug that had towed her from Gravesend,

past the endless-seeming reaches of the river, with its flat shores, and green marsh-meadows, and Dutch-looking windmills, had gone puffing off, its task at an end. The ship lay at anchor in the Pool, amid a crowd of vessels, herself towering, with her tall spires, above the forest of masts surrounding her.

It was early in the afternoon as yet, for the daylight comes early and lingers long in July. William Morgan had left Shellton-on-Sea by the first quick train, while the very first rays of the rising sun had shone upon the turbid water frothing away from under the bows of the tall ship, and the splashing paddles of the pigmy steamer that was dragging her up-stream. There was plenty of light as yet, and the passengers and the crew, and the captain and mates too, not impossibly, were as eager to touch the hard firm earth as those who have sailed from the antipodes have a right to be. It was of no use to suggest to the landmen that they had better spend another night quietly on board, so as to have a whole day before them when they should quit the vessel. It was of as little use to advise the forecastle Jacks to stay and earn extra 'pay

by helping to unload the ship; the sailors were wild for the shore and their liberty, hungering and thirsting, too many of them, poor fellows, to spend their wages in a short week's folly and frenzy among the water-side publicans and dancing-rooms. Every one was for the shore.

It was the passengers' turn first; and when they and their effects had gone off in boats, the crew, with their chests, and bags, and bundles, and many of the men carrying a cage of outlandish Australian birds, a cockatoo tied to a perch, or some other marketable pet from the other side of the world, came tumbling up and went ashore too. The ship was left in charge of the second-mate, the apprentices, and one lame old mariner who had seen enough of the world and its vanities to prefer earning wages as a ship-keeper in port, to sowing hard-won money broadcast among the harpies that prey on sailors. But, according to articles, the voyage was over; the anchor was down; the men were free, and the captain was to meet them by appointment at the shipping-office, to pay them their due.

A curious scene it was, the door of that

shipping-office, around which the freshly-landed seamen lounged, waiting their turn to be called in. Within, the merchant-captain, the clerks, and one of the partners in the firm that owned the ship, were busy with gold and silver, ink and papers, and ledgers and log-book, checking off the wages due. There was some little argument now and then between payer and payee, on account of stoppages for purser's clothes supplied on the voyage, or for advances made in Australia, but on the whole all went smoothly. The men took their money, accompanied in some cases—not all, by any means—by a kind word or two from their late commander, and went their way. It was outside the office, however, that the student of life would have seen something to interest him, rather than inside it, where the dull routine of business was carried on.

The *Blackcap* was a good ship; her skipper, Captain Bartletop, was a worthy man enough, strict but just; and the owners, Millidge Brothers, bore a high name in the trade. They neither stinted the ship's supply of boats and stores, of limejuice and provisions, nor deceived

the steerage passengers by false promises of accommodation never to be afforded; nor kept their seamen waiting for their wages, and living meanwhile on the proceeds of tickets discounted by the greedy crimps. Their rule was to give fair wage for honest work, and their accounts were balanced as soon as the ship came into harbour.

The group, then, waiting at the door of the office had none of those sad characteristics that are too often to be seen at the water-side. There were no miserable wretches, too weak to stand, living skeletons, scurvy-gnawed, bloodless, carried ashore like so many bales, to die in the *Dreadnought* hospital-ship. There was no starved and beaten apprentice to show his scars and hollow cheeks in a police-court, no black steward or Spanish sailor to scandalise the readers of newspapers by a tale of long-continued tortures and indignities carried on with devilish ingenuity under the hot tropic sun, such as sometimes sickens us. There was no sullen undercurrent of muttering among the men concerning some shipmate foully done to death in far-off seas, murdered, as it were, by inches, and

whose blood cried for vengeance, not always successfully, to the dull ears of human justice.

A healthy, sunburned gang were the hands of the *Blackcap*, in their summer frocks or jackets of duck or flannel, with cabbage-palm hats on their heads, or handkerchiefs knotted around their brown foreheads; but they were of all sorts and sizes, as the crews of our merchant marine usually are in these days. There were fine stalwart A.B.s, with large whiskers, open faces, and curly hair, the typical sailor, picturesque and superb, but these were few; the rest were foreigners, boys, landsmen, and "ordinary" seamen, the sweepings of a port under the Southern Cross. Naturally, around this group roved the parasites that live upon the earnings of sailors, hungry for plunder—crimps, touts, and Jew-dealers in all commodities, keepers of boarding-houses, skittle-sharpers, and not a few bold-eyed women, clamorously intent on welcoming an old acquaintance to his native shores, and by no means disinclined to begin a sudden friendship with a new one. Offers of all sorts of civilities, from a glass of grog for luck, to an advantageous barter for preter-

naturally cheap watches and gold chains, came raining on the new-comers, and in many cases the land-sharks secured their victims.

Not in one case, however, and this was the more notable because the man I speak of was left nearly to the last waiting his turn to be paid. A handsome, shapely young fellow of eight or nine and twenty, or thereabouts, not very tall, but with a figure that combined strength and activity in a remarkable degree. He had a clear dark skin like that of a Spaniard; but his brown hair, curling naturally, was of the rich light shade almost peculiar to the British Isles, and the tune he was whistling was British too.

A salt-water dandy, evidently, was this young sailor, and one of those born artists in dandyism who can produce an effect with very indifferent materials. He wore the coarse slop-shop jacket and clean duck trousers with a jaunty air that none of his shipmates could attain to; the red silk handkerchief around his neck was gracefully adjusted; the broad falling collar of his blue seaman's shirt was fastened at the throat by a brooch of pink coral; and the cabbage-palm hat rested lightly on his brown curls. There was

a saucy smartness about the man, a brisk restlessness, too, which he evinced by his frequent change of posture, no less than by the quick, piercing glances which he threw around him at intervals. His was manifestly one of those enviable constitutions which possess a superabundance of vitality, and whose health and strength create a positive need for energetic employment of some sort. There he stood waiting, apparently careless of the curiosity which he excited among the interested throng of miscellaneous hangers-on upon seafaring men. Susan from Wapping, and likewise Sall, in vain claimed him as a friend of former times, under the hypothetical names of Jack and Tom. They might as well have ogled St. Senanus himself. So with the Jews, the touts, the crimps, the jovial, open-hearted skittle-sharpers, who hailed him as "shipmet," "noble captain," and so forth, and were anxious to drink with him and to pay for the privilege. None of these bloodsuckers could make anything of this Stoic of the forecastle.

"Richard Peters, ordinary seaman—step this way!" Then, indeed, he started, and asking

the two remaining men to "keep an eye on his traps," he went in after the clerk who had called him by name, and the office-door closed upon him. There, within the counting-house, he found his captain, and young Mr. Millidge the owner, and three or four subordinates, awaiting him.—"Here, Peters, is your money. You have earned it well, which is more than I can say of some of our hard bargains. Cast your eye over the paper here, and see that all is right. Here is the advance-ticket for the slops you had served out to you—and here is the receipt you must sign—and here is the balance due."

Thus spoke Captain Bartletop, with a hearty voice and a kind look. Richard Peters made his bow of recognition for this civil greeting, and then picked up the paper, and glanced at its contents, while the others glanced at him. He had taken off his cabbage-palm hat on coming in, and they had a good view of his sunburned face.

A bold, pleasant face: broad, low brow, squarely cut: cheek-bones rather high; eyes of the darkest grey, very bright, but not large, and too restless perhaps; but then such a firm

mouth, that contained a fine set of strong white teeth, and could smile agreeably enough. Large features, not regular, but fit to charm a woman's eye; and a very marked expression of audacious, but not ill-natured self reliance. The face was that of a man powerful for good or evil. And the form matched the face. The broad chest and the supple strength of the limbs were such as would have done credit to an athlete of old days. Even the muscular right hand, with its strong wrist stained blue by intricate tattooing of mermaids, anchors, and true lovers' knots, indelibly done in gunpowder, was a model of wiry force and deftness.

Mr. Millidge nudged the captain with his elbow, and as the sailor laid down the paper and took the pen to sign, Captain Bartletop spoke: "All right, eh, Peters?"

"All right, sir," said the person addressed, as he wrote his name in bold black characters—not a running-hand, however, but one in which the letters slope backwards.

"Not much coming to you, after all, considering what a good sailor you proved," remarked the skipper; "but that's your fault my lad, not

mine. Why did you ship as ordinary seaman, when you might have signed articles as a prime A.B., and got able seaman's wages, Peters?"

The man looked up laughingly; one of those curious laughs it was which are impudent but yet not offensive. "I was bashful, perhaps, sir. My hand was out, too, and for aught I knew, I might not have proved worth my salt. It was so long, you see, sir, since I had handled a rope, I half thought I should turn out a landlubber," said Mr. Richard Peters, respectfully easy of bearing.

"Yet you are brown as a berry, my man—hands well tanned, too. Been at the gold, I suppose, and not lucky?" asked the shipowner.

"Not very lucky, sir. Never was but once," was the quiet answer.

Then Captain Bartletop, after exchanging glances with his principal, spoke out very kindly and at some length. What he wanted was, not to lose this sailor—to whom he frankly declared he had taken a great liking—altogether from the forecabin of the *Blackcap* and the employ of Millidge Brothers. He roundly affirmed that

he had never had a better hand on board his ship; that if Peters liked to ship for the next outward voyage, he should be rated as an able seaman of the first class; and if he conducted himself as he had hitherto done, would ask the owners' permission to make him third-mate. "I don't want you to bind yourself in a moment," said the merchant-captain in conclusion: "have your run ashore, and your spree, if you are not too shrewd to fling away your money like the rest of our poor harebrained fellows, and come back in a month to sign articles here. You must have been respectably brought up, and ought not to lose a chance of bettering yourself in life. I speak for your good, my man."

The sailor hesitated, then he put the money in his pocket, and picked up his hat. "Many thanks, sir," he said, "for a very kind offer; and if I go to sea again before the mast, I'd never ask a better captain or a better ship. But mayhap I may not go to sea—anyway, as a seaman. If I do sign articles for a long voyage, I promise to come here first and ask if Captain Bartletop wants me.—And now gentlemen, with thanks for all kindness." He made a sweeping

bow, and especial duck of his handsome curly head towards the captain, and in an instant he was gone. Shaking hands with his two remaining shipmates, he took up his effects, which were light to carry—he had no sea-chest, but only a bag and a bundle—and roughly pushing his way through the lingering touts and disreputable idlers, walked briskly off to a broader thoroughfare, where he found an empty cab, hailed it, entered it, bag, bundle, and all, and was driven off.

Captain Bartletop, rather crestfallen, remained to talk with Mr. Millidge. “I’m disappointed, sir. I thought I had more influence with the man than that, Mr. James.”

Young Mr. Millidge made answer to the captain. “Never mind, Bartletop—never mind. As good fish in the sea, I should say, as ever came out of it. A fine fellow, too. I like the looks of the obstinate young dog well enough.”

Just then, quiet and unobtrusive as usual, dropped in a detective. He had heard of the *Blackcap*’s safe arrival and rapid voyage. He came to wish his old acquaintance, Captain

Bartletop, good-luck, and—and to ask just a question or two. There was, he remarked, a party expected home from Australia, a young married man, convicted at the Central Criminal Court, and whose sentence was not worked out, or nearly worked out. As a general rule, it was left to the Australian police to deal with such persons at the port of embarkation. But this was a peculiar case. There were great guns at the Colonial Office—and here the sergeant of detectives looked mysterious—who were anxious lest a particular transport should return from the southern hemisphere to the northern. It was almost a government matter the order to prevent the escape of James Sark.

Very readily and very frankly, the shipowner and the captain of the clipper produced the papers of the *Blackcap*. There was the list of passengers. There, if it would do the sergeant any good to see it, was the list of the crew. There was no young married couple among the passengers, first cabin, intermediate, or steerage, who, either on paper or by verbal description, realised the policeman's ideal portraiture of Mr.

and Mrs. Sark. There was but one young woman—young women do not very often come back from Australia—one, a widow, young, dark, good-looking, melancholy, respectable—a Mrs. Walsh. No one else.

“We shan’t trouble Mrs. Walsh!” said the good-natured detective, rubbing his stout sleek hands together; “we’re on the look-out for very different game, we are!”

But alas for human perspicacity! Before the officer employed by the Colonial Office—or, more correctly, since his services were never charged to the nation in the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s little bill, by some one high in the Colonial Office—had left the counting-house after accepting some modest spirituous refreshment, the cab that conveyed Richard Peters, ordinary seaman, had reached the corner of Cecil Street, Strand. There the sailor alighted, paid and discharged his cabman, and, on foot, made his way down that hospitable street, where every second window displayed its fly-blown card of lodgings, lodgings, always lodgings.

Slowly the man walked, carrying his bag and bundle, looking sharply around. Presently,

from the narrow doorway of a house where the brass bell-pulls studded the door-post like studs in an ornamental casket, there emerged into sight a human face, the only face in that Sahara of lodging-houses—a beautiful face, worn and tired, but young, dark, fierce, handsome—the face of a dark-haired, bright-eyed, oval-faced young woman, with a passionate, wild, tender look in the eyes that we do not often see in the eyes of women of our own race. She was pale, but her colour rose, sudden and crimson, as she saw the sailor.

“All right, Loys?” asked the man gently.

“All right, dear Jem; we live here.” That was the answer. She drew him in, greeting him as none but women can do—clinging to him, looking up in his face; and her eyes were proud, and fond, and eager all at once. The eyes of a loving woman are wonderfully eloquent. Hers told tales. There had been trouble, shame, pain, but it was over now. Surely, yes—surely the part that had been acted so painfully all through the weary voyage was over now. It had been a dull sad dream of widowhood, but it was over now.

CHAPTER XIV.

STILL WATER.

LIFE, which, in some scenes, may be likened to a torrent's rush and roar, and in others to a stagnant pool, festering in unwholesome isolation, seemed, at St. Pagans Abbey and at Shellton Manor, to flow on calmly and peacefully enough, like a river, deep and quiet. But even in that calm and peace there were perhaps forces silently at work below the surface, that were certain, in time, to mar the serene composure of the indwellers of these two country mansions. But for the present, all went smoothly on.

Very pleasant was the sea-coast during that period, at which the long English spring had given way to the short, joyous English summer. The breeze that sprang freshly up at every turn of the ebb-tide, was doubly grateful to the senses

now that the "heated term," as the Americans, with expressive ugliness of diction, choose to name the dog-days, had set in with unaccustomed sultriness. The corn ripened on the upland ridges; and the red gold of the barley, and the pale gold of the wheat, speckled with scarlet poppies and blue corn-flowers—welcome bits of bright colour, that even the sternness of utilitarians could hardly have had the heart to wish away—and the silver ears of the feathery oats, swayed merrily in the south wind. The woods were rich in their glory of gold-green leaves, and the hops in the valley threw out their tendrils like a verdant web, and twined their heavy clusters around the tall ash-poles. A good harvest was looked for, and not by agriculturists only. The Shellton-on-Sea tradesmen and lodging-house keepers, though they grumbled, of course, were doing well in their degree. The watering-place was surprisingly full, considering that the London season, far spent, but not quite over as yet, still kept the bulk of the polite world in town.

Ruth Morgan was still a visitor at St. Pagans, and so indeed was the actual owner of the house,

who obstinately refused to be considered in any other light than as a guest. Every few days brought about the announcement of a new plan of Lord Ulswater's for the disposal of the rest of the summer. He would go to Norway ; several of his friends had plagued him to go to Norway as one of their party, and murder salmon by the ton. Harcourt Leslie, and the young Marquis of Glencreel, and Mr. Rods, Q.C., who was then anticipating the Solicitor-generalship, and who, being as mighty at sport and at whist as with his legal wig on, was hand-in-glove with a score of youthful patricians, had written to beg him to join them. Laxington was going to spend the shining hours on board his yacht, Tregooze thought of a little active scrambling among the High Alps, Chirper was going to Egypt, and some other Eleusinians to Iceland—and each and all desired Lord Ulswater's company. The owner of St. Pagans alternately expressed a semi-serious decision in favour of all these projects.

Ruth Morgan, however, noticed with a strange sinking of the heart, that although Lord Ulswater was so continually talking of his departure

for such incongruous places as Radjkivik and Grand Cairo, he not only stayed where he was, but spent a great portion of his time at Shellton Manor. She was quick to take alarm where her brother's interests were concerned, and her original dislike to John, Baron Ulswater, had never been conquered, even by his delicate kindness towards herself. She admitted that he was very kind, gentle, and considerate, and that all she saw and heard should have tended to obliterate any latent prejudice against him. But the prejudice was perverse, and held its ground doggedly; and presently her woman's wit suggested to her that it would be as well for William Morgan if he were not away, at least unless Lord Ulswater were away too.

This poor girl's devoted love for her only brother caused her more pain than pleasure, after the fashion of such attachments; but she was quite unselfish, and if she suffered from the neglect of the object of all this fondness, she never resented it. She even shrank from accusing William, at the bar of her own heart, of having neglected her. True, he had ridden or driven over to the abbey more rarely than might

have been expected of him, so that Lady Harriet, who was rigid in her old-world standard of duty, had reproached him to his face with forgetting his sister. True, also, he had started on an expedition of undefined duration without so much as bidding her good-bye, save by a careless note written as he passed through London. But there are some women who do not expect the men they love to be very good or very fond, who are willing to furnish more than their fair share of affection or passion in a partnership for life, and who do all they can to persuade themselves that the clay feet of their idols are of fine gold.

Ruth, then, felt herself somewhat in the position of a dragon bound to guard the golden apples of the Hesperides until her brother, the rightful owner, should return. No such charge as this had, in point of fact, been made over to her, even tacitly. William Morgan had a large leaven of pride lurking in his disposition. He could never have brought himself to admit to any one that he suspected or feared that the affections of Flora Hastings might be stolen away from him; least of all could he have

induced himself to confide in Ruth on such a point; for the embryo M.P. for Oakshire had some half-formed notion that his sickly sister was displeased by his engagement; that she had some fanciful objection to his marrying at all, on the ground of his being her only living relative and of her own helplessness, and what seemed to him her extravagant sentimentalism on his account. But therein the Fortunatus of Cramlingham was mistaken, and did his sister a wrong.

Ruth, indeed, had been pained by the news of his betrothal to Miss Hastings, not because the bride was ineligible, but because this match, or any match, appeared in her imagination as a severance of such slender tie of fraternal intercourse as still existed between her brother and herself. His wife, for anything she knew, might not be her friend. High-born damsels, who marry wealthy plebeians, do not always feel a lively sympathy for the kith and kin of their parvenu consorts. But Ruth was not selfish. She could not help the first sting of what she regarded as a sorrow from making itself felt, but she resolutely applied herself to see the affair

from the point of view from which her brother would have her see it, and she succeeded. She had quite reconciled herself to the match, if only William should find his happiness in it; and that he would find his happiness in marrying a girl so good, and gifted, and beautiful as Ruth acknowledged Miss Hastings to be, she was easily persuaded.

With a woman, consent means assistance. The cold, negative *laissez faire* that satisfies our ideas of friendship or duty, has no place in the ethics of the impulsive sex. Ruth was no sooner assured that her brother's main hopes in life were bound up with the fidelity of Flora Hastings, than she began to consider herself in some measure responsible for the fruition of her brother's hopes. He was affianced, and he did not marry. It was not wholly his fault. It was not absolutely the fault of Miss Hastings, although she certainly had her share of that apparently capricious repugnance to fix a day for the marriage, which most girls who do not love, and some girls who do love, exhibit.

But a man of William Morgan's enormous wealth cannot do as he pleases. His great

means accumulate around him certain long-remembered stewards, agents, men of business, hangers-on, paid and unpaid, each of whom claimed to have a voice in the transaction of their patron's affairs. Has no one ever noticed how a king, for instance, is hampered by his counsellors, sages, and led-captains? Look into history! How rare are the occasions when a monarch could do as he would, could give back a forfeited estate, pardon a criminal, chop off a head, crush a parliament. In vain the prince would act with princely self-will. There are always loyal and venerable persons of both sexes to clasp the royal knees, to weep, and pray, and cling, and generally to get in His Majesty's path until His Majesty, tired, gives in to the power of pertinacious and well-meaning boredom.

So it was with William Morgan. The very magnitude of his fortune rendered it proper for every banker, land-agent, solicitor, or old friend of his father's, to interpose barriers of time, talk, and conveyancing between the young lord of lands and funds and his very innocent desire to be early and well married. All kinds of persons

felt it their duty to protest this, that, and the other. He was ready to make magnificent settlements on Flora Hastings. The Middle Temple, by its barristers; Old Square, Lincoln's Inn, by its attorneys, pleaded against the ultra magnificence of these pecuniary arrangements. There were such and such contingencies, probable and unlikely, which the lawyers insisted on pressing upon the notice of their reluctant client. It was their duty to mention one point, to urge another, to point out difficulties everywhere. The lawyers employed on the Hastings' side took up the bone of contention with lawyer-like enthusiasm. Time and money were consumed in their correspondence, cautious, and backed by the opinion of counsel.

The money was of no account, but time was.

Time, sometimes, is more than money. William Morgan could have signed a cheque for a very great sum, but he had no more power over time than poorer men—less, perhaps, than some of them. And, indeed, it would have taken a strong, brutal despot—Napoleon I., Henry VIII.—to have made short work with the excuses and protests of the very humble and

obedient servants who came between their master and his heart's desire.

So there was Fortunatus Morgan at Bridchester, in Oakshire, while his promised bride was still at Shellton Manor, and John, Lord Ulswater, was as a wolf prowling around the sheepfold. If a wolf, Ruth confessed to herself that he was an amiable and decorous wolf. He paid no ostensible court to the girl who was to be the wife of his—not friend, possibly, but friendly acquaintance. He was very much at Shellton. Nothing was more natural. There were attractive ladies, men of the world, political gossip, and one of Thurston's best billiard-tables, at Shellton. St. Pagans was a little sad and slow in its grand dulness; it was not to be wondered at that its owner should seek amusement elsewhere. The Right Honourable Robert and Mrs. Hastings saw nothing amiss in their neighbour's friendliness, nothing to dread in the frequent intercourse between their daughter and that neighbour.

There were plenty of guests at Shellton Manor: innocent country young ladies; young gentlemen, by no means innocent, from Mayfair;

married couples of good blood and breeding ; and all these were ready to catch the first signs of the mischief to come. Even the honest, rosy-cheeked girls from distant counties had a fine natural scent for a flirtation. Love and love-making had occupied their brains and their tongues before they passed from the nursery to the school-room. They were as ready to babble of the evident understanding between Miss Hastings and the noble proprietor of St. Pagans, as ever was a newly-entered fox-hound to give tongue along the hedgerow where Reynard may have passed.

Of two things, one was certain—either Lord Ulswater had great tact, or there was really nothing between Miss Hastings and him. It was obvious to the dullest observer—to the servants, for instance—and John Carnac had never been slow, as some gentlemen are, to acknowledge that a footman has eyes, and that even the discreetest of butlers can see—that my Lord spoke less often to Miss Hastings than to any lady there. It would have been more reasonable to tax him with a passion for Miss Warburton than for the daughter of the house.

He was always "laughing and chaffing"—so indignant Captain Crashaw, who was excessively inclined to pay attention to that florid young lady and her twenty-eight thousand pounds, averred—with Dora Warburton. The few quiet sentences spoken in the ear of Flora Hastings, as opportunity served, passed for nothing.

But Ruth Morgan, vigilant for her brother's sake, was uneasy at her self-assigned post as sentinel.

"Mine will be," she murmured to herself, "but a short, short time here on earth; but I would wish to see him happy before I go from him. His happiness depends on this girl. She may be true. I think she is good. But, ah me! does she love him? Does she know what love is?"

Poor little casuist, putting questions to her own fond heart and bewildered brain, as the moonlight fell, solemn and silvery, upon the gray stones of St. Pagans. Perhaps the inexorable logic of facts had answered her already. Perhaps Flora Hastings was beginning to learn, slowly and timidly, after the experience of two London seasons "what love was."

CHAPTER XV.

MR. MARSH AT HOME.

CAVENDISH TERRACE, Shellton-on-Sea, is perhaps the most ambitiously designed of all the rows of dwellings in that watering-place. Its noble mansions, as they were described in the printed prospectus of the speculative builder who planned them, towered majestically above the vulgar roofs on either hand. Even the Georgian glories of the Marine Parade, where royal Dukes and Serene Highnesses had once been harboured in stuffy little bow-windowed rooms—even those quasi-historic glories paled before the stucco-splendour of the Terrace. As for York Crescent, Clarence Villas, Albert Square, and the rest, they were no more to be compared with Cavendish Terrace than dwarfs to a giant. The noble mansions

boasted of a most extensive frontage, and a grand sea-view. They had great plate-glass windows, heavy balconies, front-doors that were approached by a profusion of unnecessary stone steps, and shaded by useless Corinthian columns, much mock stone-carving in the shape of pilasters and cornices, and a perfect rabbit-warren of bedrooms.

The Terrace might have been an ornament to Utah instead of to Shellton-on-Sea, or it might have been erected by an architect strong in the Mormon faith, and anticipating the conversion of Britain to Mormon principles, so much did the number of dormitories exceed the imaginable requirements of a single family. There were windows, windows everywhere, from where the glass of the basement glared up at foot-passengers, up to the attic casements, glistening, like sly eyes, among the slates of the roof. Tall, drab-coloured, and rectangular, the huge houses stared gauntly forth upon strand and sea, like a block of highly-ornamented barracks.

Pride, however, as the proverb teaches us, will have a fall, and the pride of Cavendish Terrace, figuratively speaking, had sustained a

very severe fall indeed. The speculation had been a failure, like most of its brotherhood of hollow, overgrown shams. The tall houses, mortgaged before they were half built, re-mortgaged during the process of roofing them in, built and fitted up on credit, or with borrowed capital, had changed owners half-a-dozen times by means of foreclosure, compromise, private contract, and public auction. Each of the noble mansions might have passed for the tombstone of a small fortune buried in its unremunerative construction. There was indeed a ghastly, funereal air about the Terrace, due, perhaps, to the fact, that the sub-contractors, working on the admirable principle of low tenders and "scamped" work, had made free use of green wood, deliquescent plaster, and refuse bricks. The stucco of the frontage had peeled off here and there, showing streaks of discoloured wall beneath, like a wrinkled old face peering out through cracks in its enamel; the columns and steps were often crazy, the roofs unsound, the window and door frames warped and leaky, and the whole house a Temple of the Winds.

With all this, Cavendish Terrace was not

allowed to go to utter ruin. The first two or three batches of owners having lost their money upon it, it had now come, pretty cheaply, into the hands of small local capitalists—the brewer, the leading tradesmen, and the richest of the attorneys of Shellton. These new proprietors knew how to make the pretentious pile pay fairly well. They could not, indeed, find tenants of the opulent class for whose accommodation the houses were first designed, that is, not permanent tenants. But six of the eight dwellings were inhabited by hard-working, anxious-eyed women, harpies to their lodgers, but to their employers as useful as are fishing-cormorants to the Chinese; and in the bathing-season a few short weeks brought in a tremendous rent, which permitted the property to lie fallow for the rest of the year, not unprofitably on the whole. The other two of the noble mansions were let unfurnished, Number seven to the Misses Buckram, principals of Cavendish Ladies' College, who resembled the great lexicographer, according to the elder Boswell, in keeping a school under a finer name; and Number eight to Stephen Marsh, M.R.C.S.

Mr. Marsh was at home, albeit the dining-room in which he and his wife habitually spent their hours of domestic calm, was not a very homelike-looking apartment. After all, the creation of a home depends on subjective gifts, not on objective ones. Many a very poor cottage, many a tenement in the narrow back-lanes of Shellton-on-Sea, realised the home idea far more vividly than Mr. Marsh's noble mansion had ever done. The house, or more correctly, a portion of it, had been expensively furnished, by the joint help of credit and of the money that the surgeon had mysteriously acquired when first he caused his bran-new brass-plate to be screwed upon the front door—expensively, but in the worst possible taste, for the furniture was flashy and tawdry, highly varnished, no doubt, but exactly the sort of furniture that sets forth from the parent warehouse on a principle of limited liability, and succumbs to a few months' wear and tear.

At the same time, it must be owned that Mr. Marsh's furniture had not been fairly dealt with. The master of the house drank more than was good for him; the mistress was a slatternly,

peevish woman; the servants ill-chosen, unpaid, and not at all looked after; and the children under no more discipline than if they had been so many Bashi Bazouks. Also Mr. Marsh's worldly goods had been twice taken in execution for shop-debts or arrears of rent, and once absolutely carted off to a broker's, whence they had been ransomed by some supply of ready cash, to get which Mrs. Marsh had gone down on her knees to her brother at the old farm—her brother, who had forbidden Stephen Marsh to darken his doors, but who relented this once at the spectacle of his sister's sore distress.

There, however, in the dining-room of the noble mansion, surrounded by rickety furniture, weak in its casters, damaged as to its veneering—surrounded also by headless horses, broken-nosed dolls, and other battered toys—by garish new pictures, the raw bright colours of which glared out of the gilt frames like signboards wet from Dick Tinto's brush—by a bruised copper coal-scuttle, a meerschaum pipe as brown as nicotine could make it, a litter of books and feminine wearing-apparel more or less incomplete, a cigar-box, a skull, a heap of articles

“too numerous to be mentioned,” and a starved canary crying shrilly, in bird-language, for food and water, from behind the tarnished wires of his neglected cage, sat Stephen Marsh, Mary Ann his wife, and the two elder children.

The Member of the College of Surgeons was in dressing-gown and slippers; no coquettish morning-robe of velvet and gold, no Turkish papouches heavy with embroidery, such as the hero of a Haymarket novel might wear, but a shabby brown shawl dressing-gown, and the common buff slippers that were sold, at vile price, along with children’s wooden sand-spades, at the door of the local bazaar. With his drooping head, his ruffled black hair, and the dull glimmer of his shallow eyes, the disreputable practitioner might have been at least a first-cousin to one of the poor draggled vultures eating out their own hearts (in default of the liver of Prometheus) in their cages at the Zoological Gardens, Regent’s Park.

And yet the occupant of Number eight Cavendish Terrace was for the moment free from care, and in a sort of pseudo-prosperity that extorted reluctant civilities from erst growling shopkeepers.

The surgeon—no one knew how—had suddenly come into the possession of enough money to pay the more pressing of the claims upon him, in whole or in part. Also, another gleam of prosperity, from another quarter, had let in a moderate amount of social sunshine to diversify the saddened, sullen, brooding gloom of his profitless life. An old chum of his, who had known him, and liked him well when the twain were Burschen at a High-German university, amid gaudy caps, white beer-mugs, porcelain pipes, crooked sabres, scarred faces, and the peculiar gabble of the student tribe, half pedantic, half poetic, wholly boyish, had wished to do Stephen Marsh a good turn. He, the friend, was now a thriving doctor in one of the very few sugar-producing colonies that pay their way royally, and he had offered to send over two young colonists, sons of rich men, who would willingly pay a thumping premium to Mr. Marsh for the privilege of learning the art of healing. What a chance for a lean surgeon, out of elbows, out of character, was here presented!

But Mr. Marsh was sulky in word, and thought, and deed, as he sat, late in the day, blinking at

the golden daylight, in dressing-gown and slippers, ill-shaven, ill-washed, unsteady of eye and hand.

"I call it," he said surlily—"I call it cursed impertinence on Brophy's part. What right has he to patronise me, I should like to know, or to presume that his infernal colonial cubs, with their five hundred pounds, would furnish what he calls an acceptable addition to my income? Confound him! I was twice as good a man as he when we were at college—I was a Fox when he was a plain Bursche, and—— Hang the brats! what a tease they are; and Miss Buckram's gabies of girls, what a row they make, strum, strum on those brutal jingling pianos, and you—Mary Ann, can't you speak?"

The last words were very querulously uttered. Everything, in truth, vexed the surgeon's shattered nerves, far gone as the man was in drink and irritability. And certainly, through the thin contract-built walls, the noise which Miss Buckram's pupils made in playing their scales with hesitating fingers, on instruments that might have been supplied by the ironmonger, to judge by their tone, was the reverse of an anodyne.

Also the children were clamorous and dirty as to their faces and fingers, and Mrs. Marsh was in one of her silent moods, and, with her, to be silent meant to be sullen.

“What do you expect me to say?” asked Mrs. Marsh, slowly lifting her eyes from the dogs-eared novel, greasy with much thumbing, and sunwarped as to its binding, on which her feeble brains were busy. There are, of course, worse ways of spending time than in the reading of novels; but with the wife of Stephen’s bosom, novel-reading was a vice. She had taken to fiction as others take to drink, and ordered incessant stores of Minerva Press literature—no modern tales, but the romances of Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis, and the other Rosicrucians—as drunkards order a dram. The circulating library of Shellton-on-Sea, the subscribers to which grumbled much at the scanty supply of new works concealed in recondite nooks beneath the counter, had yet a large room the shelves of which were furnished with a most wonderful collection of old dusky novels bound in boards; such novels as *Lydia Languish* caused her maid to purvey for her by armfuls; and on these

Mrs. Marsh batted at will. It was an old habit, and it would, after all, have been hard to grudge the poor woman her only pleasure.

“What do you expect me to say?” asked Mrs. Marsh sulkily. Most of us can hear, and even heed, in a sort of semi-conscious way, and her mind was not so busy with the Moated Grange, or with the page under the gigantic helmet in the castle-hall of Otranto, but that she was aware of the drift of her husband’s discourse. That loving consort gruffly retorted that he expected no sense from her lips, at any rate, but that he would be glad to know what she thought of the delightful treat of having two conceited young colonial puppies quartered on him, Stephen Marsh, to be taught the healing art.

“You are very civil indeed—you always are. But if you want my opinion, here it is for you,” said Mrs. Marsh deliberately from behind her book: “You ought to be glad of any honest means of paying the butcher and baker—any honest means. And if we could get credit so as to furnish two nice airy bedrooms with a look-out over the sea, and if the young men really pay such a premium, you ought to jump at it,

unless you're quite cracked, as I sometimes think." In explanation of which project, it may be said that not one-fourth part of the noble mansion had been furnished when the surgeon sent in his tawdry chattels. Most of the rooms stood bleak and bare; and it was on this account that Mrs. Marsh, with a woman's practical view of affairs, had suggested furnishing two rooms for the expected pupils from hot latitudes.

The lady's advice was good sound counsel, certainly, and yet it had the effect of making her husband more angry than before. There were several reasons for this. The form of Mrs. Marsh's speech was not conciliatory; there was a taunt tacked to it; and, worse still, very great stress was laid upon the word "honest," which word was repeated. Now, this had reference to bygone but still smouldering quarrels, and, as the surgeon well knew, bore more immediately upon the mysterious sums of money which he had twice obtained, and of the source of which his wife knew no more than she could glean from the broken utterances that dropped from his lips as he lay sleeping at her side.

But, after all, what annoyed the surgeon most was that the advice was not only rational, but that it agreed with his own secret determination. Headstrong and ill-conditioned as Stephen Marsh might be, he was not mad enough to forfeit such a chance as that which had apparently dawned before him. He meant to take the pupils and the thousand guineas, if only he could get them; but, like a pike that cannot resist the silvery gudgeon that the angler twirls before his shark-like snout, but will not pouch the bait kindly, Mr. Marsh desired to be pitied for the prospective good-luck that had befallen him. He broke out roughly: "You are a fool, Mary Ann. Do you think that I—a man that knows more of anatomy, practically and theoretically, than any six of the pompous old charlatans who get all the fees, and all the praise, and all the good appointments, over the heads of their superiors—that I am going to play bear-leader to a brace of young jackanapes from Demerara or Berbice, or wherever my patron, Brophy, forsooth, chooses to feel the pulses of greater idiots than himself! Sooner than that, I'd——" And here Mr. Marsh concluded his harangue, not with any

regular peroration, but with a very ugly oath and a very ugly look, supplemented by a spiteful kick that sent a shabby footstool flying half-way across the frayed carpet, and set the children off crying in concert; but Mrs. Marsh not taking up the ball of contention, there was no active war. In the case of this couple, a sort of quietism was setting in, after years of bickering. There were skirmishes still, but not such battles-royal as when, for instance, Mary Ann had fled by night to a friend's house, and from that vantage-ground had obtained the intervention of the Queen's Justices to bind over her Stephen to keep the peace.

Accordingly, the only answer which Mrs. Marsh made to her husband's verbal assault was a little sneering laugh, and then the lady returned to the patient perusal of her greasy volume; while the whimpering children resumed their wild sports among the legs of the lame dinner-table. Mr. Marsh sneered too, and made some pretence of reading the crumpled medical journal that lay on the table beside him, but presently arose, pushing back his high-backed elbow-chair. "I shall go out," said the surgeon, casting a

scowling glance at his wife: "anywhere else than in this doghole of a house, a man can find some peace. I can't stand much more of this chorus of squalling children; and the jangle of those infernal tin kettles next door would make any person mad—any person with brains enough to go mad, at least," concluded Mr. Marsh savagely. Then he applied himself to exchange his dressing-gown for the black coat that hung on a peg beside the bookcase, and to substitute a pair of boots, that were kept in the lower locker of that glazed receptacle for literature, for the buff slippers that he wore when at home. Large as the noble mansion might be, the long-suffering dining-room where the family usually congregated had to serve many purposes, and it suited Mr. Marsh rather to keep his walking attire within its precincts, than to adjourn to his squalid dressing-room up-stairs.

And now Mrs. Marsh laid aside her book, with an unpaid bill between its leaves by way of marker, and got up from her chair, chiding the children into temporary silence. Indifferent as she was to her lord's sarcasms, and deaf as she was to his threats and complaints, she no

sooner saw that he was in earnest on the subject of going out, than a change came over her. It was not, indeed, on every day, or even on every fine day, that the surgeon now stirred abroad; often would he pass the whole of the period between breakfast and bedtime in purposeless inaction, without caring to go out.

He was going out now, however; and it was incumbent on Mrs. Marsh to hush the children, to close her book, and to devote her energies to the task of "smartening papa up," so that he should make a decent show before the world. It was quite quaint, and almost pathetic, to see with what brisk fingers the faded wife assisted in adjusting the tie of her husband's untidy cravat, in brushing his coat, smoothing down the rebellious nap of his cheap hat, and hunting in drawers and hiding-places for a pair of gloves that should be fit for wear. The exertion brought a little colour into her pale cheeks, and a little light into her dull eyes. Her manner grew almost tender as, with womanly deftness, she put the final artistic touches to her work—tender enough, at any rate, to suggest the idea that, married to a better man, Mary Ann

Marsh, *née* Hogben, might have been a better woman.

And so Stephen Marsh was made presentable ; and so, thankless for the unasked help that his wife had afforded him in the beautifying process, the gloomy surgeon took a cursory glance at his appearance in the blotched mirror over the mantel-piece, settled his hat upon his head, and shutting the front-door after him with a bang, sallied forth.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. MARSH ABROAD.

IN a little place like Shellton-on-Sea, every one is known, more or less, with such particulars with respect of income, antecedents, character, and conduct, as those wildest and staunchest of all public providers of news, the male and female gossips of a watering-place, can collect. Mr. Marsh, albeit no native, and not indeed a very old inhabitant of the bathing-town, was very well known by sight and by repute to the larger portion of his neighbours. But though people stared at him from the other side of the street, or nudged one another and whispered as he came up the Parade, it was surprising to see how few were his acquaintance, and how shy were the Shelltonians of acknowledging his presence, by bow or word. Certainly the men

who drew the Bath-chairs gave him a grudging salute; and a few of the smaller shopkeepers, hurrying through the streets with light parcels of goods for valued customers who declined to wait until that almost mythical lad, "our errand-boy," should have concluded his game at marbles or leap-frog, made him a quick cringing bow of recognition.

But Mr. Marsh remembered with bitterness that these very men had been the most eager of the pack of suspicious creditors that bayed at his heels, and threatened to drag him down, but a little while ago, and before his late windfall of ready money had enabled him to stave off the demands of those whom he honoured with his custom; and he well knew that the principal tradesmen of the place, less rancorous against him in his insolvency, it may be, were more firm in their bad opinion of him as a rogue in grain. As for the Upper Five Hundred of the place, the would-be fashionable doctor might indeed have been under a cloud, like Diomedes before Troy, for aught that they seemed to see of him as he half slunk, half swaggered past them. From the windows of Marine Parade houses,

unfriendly eyes espied the surgeon as he went by, and tongues wagged against him as the wretch who supplanted his benefactor, beat his wife, neglected his children—the wretch who was known or supposed to have all the seven deadly sins, supplemented by the eighth crime of staying away from church, on his seared conscience.

This was no novelty: he had expected nothing better; and yet it cut him to the heart every time that the reality of it was revived. In vain he sneered and frowned, and bore his head high, and shot dark glances at the groups of those who had been his patients when he was a mere assistant to old Dennis, but who refused to know the tenant of Number eight Cavendish Terrace. In vain he told himself, what was perfectly true, that on grounds of pure intellect he was superior to most, on grounds of acquired information to perhaps all, of those who now cut him so remorselessly. He was really an astute and learned man, had received a good education, and had capped it by deep reading and deep thought; and there had been a time when ladies had pronounced Dr. Dennis's assistant a

delightful young doctor, and when old gentlemen had deigned to chat with him at library-doors or on the jetty where the band played. But now, when Stephen Marsh approached, those very ladies became suddenly engrossed in the seaward prospect, or the children's perambulators, or the very pebbles at their feet; and the red-faced, old, half-pay colonels and majors, stupid, but respectable, passed him by with stolid indifference.

Mr. Marsh had associates still, but they were night-birds, and they avoided the daylight and the open places in front of the sea, to come forth at dusk, as owls do, and talk and smoke in public-house parlours. There he was a man of some distinction still, as a scholar and a member of one of the learned professions, but none of these tavern-haunters were abroad among the innocent promenaders on whom the surgeon gazed so resentfully.

Officers of regiments and dépôts quartered in out-of-the-way places are seldom very niggardly of their acquaintance, and the officers stationed at Shellton had formerly been hand-in-glove with Mr. Marsh. This, however, was at an

earlier period of his Decline and Fall, when he was both more sober and more neat in his personal appearance than in these latter days. He had not then been excluded from the mess-room, but by degrees even his accomplishments—for he was an admirable billiard-player, could fence, sing a good song, and play on several instruments with true German taste and accuracy—could not float him in military society. One by one, his friends dropped him as a drunken fellow, who ought not to be seen speaking to a gentleman. So now the bluff jolly captains, and the candid ensigns, with their pink, smooth faces, and the elder subalterns, with accurately trimmed moustaches, and hairy terriers trotting at their heels, got out of Mr. Marsh's way, or stared straight before them, as if they saw him not. All things considered, the doctor's afternoon stroll must have been more prolific in sours than in sweets.

“It is his fault—it is all his fault: but for him, I should not be here!” Thus to himself spoke Mr. Marsh; and as he tramped along, looking curses at the Matresfamilias gathering up their brood around them, as a sort of body-

guard against the wicked surgeon's baleful approach; at the military saunterers in gray suits or Cochin-China coats; at the local he-aristocracy old and young; at the misses, with elaborate *chignons* and gay little hats—as he thus tramped along, a mental photograph of Lord Ulswater, splendidly strong, and insolently handsome, rose up before him. “It is all his fault,” snarled out Mr. Marsh, as he got beyond the foot-walk of the regular parade, past the posts and chains, and the black jetty running out into the sea, and the last bathing-machine, and found himself on a narrow strip of shingly ground, where the cliff encroached steeply upon the beach.

The promenaders, one and all, turned back, invariably, before reaching this strip of Debat-able Land between the white cliff and the rough sea; and only a few roving urchins, or a coast-guard mariner with his glass to his eye, or a washerwoman pressed for space to dry visitors' clothes in the crowded summer season, frequented the spot; yet there, when Mr. Marsh turned into its uninviting borders, were two men, walking together, with slow tread, the

loose shingle crackling harshly beneath their feet.

Ill-matched companions, these two, as they appeared when Mr. Marsh first descried them. The elder was a tall, a very tall old man, who, to judge by his inches, might have been a strapping grenadier in his youth. His shambling gait and abject bearing, however, were the reverse of soldierly ; and as he crawled and writhed along the narrow pathway, his bent back, and stooped head, and rounded shoulders, seemed to be apologising in dumb-show to the world at large for their owner's presumption in venturing to be so very tall. This meek creature, long-bodied and grizzle-headed, was clad in a suit of spongy cloth of that negative hue known as "pepper and salt;" and he had square-toed shoes, and stockings of gray worsted ; a dull, woolly-textured hat, on the dim surface of which no brushing and smoothing of a caressing hand could produce a glimmer of polish, a wisp of a black neckcloth ; and very conspicuous pewter buttons, as bright as friction and rottenstone could render them. These habiliments might at first sight have been mis-

taken for a livery ; but the most economical member of the Manchester school would hardly have put a servant into such a costume as that which the old man wore : there was no band of gold, silver, or white around the woolly hat ; no crest upon the buttons, not so much as a cipher. And yet it was a livery, for all that—the livery of Poverty as by vestry vote appointed. As the wearer drew near, the surgeon might, had he pleased, have read the capital letters S. P. worked in white upon the collar and cuffs of the pepper-and-salt coat. S. P. stood for Shellton Parish, and the old man was a pauper, clothed, lodged, and nourished in the hospitable work-house of that town, in which he held, indeed, some subordinate office, such as paupers, for indirect wages in the shape of perquisites or favour, are permitted to fill.

But Mr. Marsh knew the wearer of the coat, and the coat itself, a great deal too well for it to be necessary that he should trouble himself in deciphering the purport of the embroidered initials with which Bumbledom badges the raiment of Want. His curiosity was excited by the younger man of the two, a burly, thick-set

fellow, bandy-legged, bull-necked, with a flat face, beetling brows, and the hair closely cropped upon a head that was as round as a bullet. A sturdy, formidable figure, dressed in dusty slop-shop clothes of a yellow white, such as navvies wear in hot weather, and with a blue bird's-eye handkerchief twisted around his collarless neck. His heavy ankle-boots kicked the pebbles savagely to right and left, as he walked moodily along beside the old man; and he looked by no means the sort of wayfarer whom a nervous gentleman, if benighted, would care to encounter in the middle of a dark lane. Such a face withal, lowering, defiant, resentful, a face which in its dull but menacing discontent resembled that of a fierce overdriven bull.

Nearer and nearer yet—and now, strange to say, Mr. Marsh began to distinguish a likeness between those two faces, that in lineaments and expression were so unlike. Though the senior had a long nose, hooked and high-bridged, a forehead high and narrow, cheek-bones high and sharp, small eyes placed very near to the fleshy beak of a nose, and a mouth as mean as the eyes; while the junior's scarred countenance

was that of a sulky mastiff, bluff and grim, there was a likeness between them after all.

The tall old pauper took off his hat with a cringing bow as he met the surgeon—for this appointment of workhouse medical officer was the only piece of paid professional employment, it may be remembered, remaining to Mr. Marsh, and he lost by it, chary as he was of expensive drugs—but the strong man beside him stared rudely in Mr. Marsh's face, and kept his pipe between his lips, and his greasy cap untouched upon his head, as he paced on. Mr. Marsh said nothing; he nodded and frowned, but there was something in his eye which the old man, with an instinct born of servility and his long habit of watching [the eyes of his superiors, interpreted correctly enough. He answered it, however, by nothing but another humble twitch at the brim of his woolly hat, and slunk on, crouchingly, at the side of his broad-shouldered companion. Mr. Marsh sat himself down upon a broken windlass that had drawn up bathing-machines in what were called the palmy days of Shellton-on-Sea, when royal dukes were not quite so scarce on its parade as the Dinornis in New Zealand,

and waited. He had not to wait long. He saw the two figures come to a halt just where a lane that skirted some stabling afforded a short-cut to the poorer and more crowded portion of the town; there was evidently a brief debate, and then the younger of the men disappeared in the shadow of the lane, and the old man, as Mr. Marsh had expected, came shambling back alone.

The woolly hat came fairly off the grizzled head this time, as its wearer ducked and bent his limber spine before the surgeon.

"Hope I see you well, Mr. Marsh, sir?" said the pauper, with an abject smile. He said no more, but stood fawningly waiting for the other to speak; and as he towered over the surgeon seated on the windlass, he bore an odd resemblance to the stork in *Æsop* when perplexed how to dip his long bill in the fox's platter.

"Huller!" said Mr. Marsh, after a pause, "who was that fellow I met you with? That son of yours, eh?—Don't lie, sir!" he added, very severely, for he saw by the old man's false smile and shifting eye that he was seeking to evade the question.

“Why, yes, I must own to it, sir. My son William, sir, poor fellow—it was him certainly. No offence, sir. Begging you to excuse the feelings of a father that once knew better days, and——”

Here Mr. Huller was interrupted.

“Hark you, you precious old humbug, don’t try it on with *me*,” said Mr. Marsh roughly; “I know all about you and your better days. Usher in a school, singer in a choir first and then in a tap-room, bonnet at a gambling-house, tavern-waiter in the Haymarket, tub-preacher, begging-letter writer, book-keeper to an omnibus proprietor, thimble-rigger, billiard-marker, photographer’s tout—such, with intervals of tread-mill and oakum-picking, and perhaps some minor vagabondage that I forget, out of all you told me in your drunken confidences, you tipsy old sinner—those are your better days, and that is a fair sketch of your career—is it not?”

Mr. Marsh’s manner had quite altered; his eye was stern, and his voice as hard as if he had been a French Procureur or an old-world Inquisitor. The tall old pauper wriggled and

abased himself before his cruel questioner. The ready tears rose to his eyes.

"Too true, sir; and it has brought me to this," answered Huller; and as he pointed to the workhouse mark upon the cuff of his pepper-and-salt coat, a drop or two fell from the old man's eyes upon the sleeve of that eleemosynary garment. Tears of regret, at any rate, possibly of shame or of remorse; or they may have been the mere product of agitation, acting on a frame soddened by such a limited quantity of strong-waters swallowed in secret, as a pauper official can get by fair means or foul; and certainly the orbits of Mr. Huller's eyes were very red, and his lip and hand unsteady, and there was a slight perfume of gin that clung to him like an alcoholic atmosphere.

"Then don't try to humbug *me*," said Mr. Marsh, shaking a threatening forefinger at his aged acquaintance. "Your son, William, is the chap that was transported, wasn't he?"

"He was—in trouble, sir," said the father, coughing with humility behind his hand.

"Garrotting, eh?" demanded Mr. Marsh curtly.

Huller coughed again, and was compelled to admit that his offspring's quarrel with the law had been on account of "something of that sort."

"Then, has he worked his time out? Has he a ticket-of-leave, or is he an escaped convict?" succinctly inquired the surgeon.

The pauper's pliant spine was bowed still lower, and his bony hands were rubbed together, as he deferentially answered that his "boy" had been liberated "for good."

"For a strange sort of 'good,' judging by his looks," said Mr. Marsh sneeringly. "Now, what is he doing here? Don't shuffle or equivocate; don't lie. If you talk to me of hay, and harvest, and hop-picking, of course I shall know you lie. Why is he here?"

Thus adjured, Huller *père* urbanely informed Mr. Marsh that Shellton was his son's native place, as well as his own; that Bill had come down from London, finding work slack, to—to see his old father, and to—to see whether his parent could suggest to him any available means of gaining a livelihood, or——"

"Yes, I see—put him up to a 'plant,' you

mean," broke in Mr. Marsh with a contemptuous grin. He had narrowly watched the old man's face, knowing how hard it is for a liar to lie with a pair of hostile eyes fixing his own ; and he knew that the pauper had spoken truth, or such an approach to truth as those gin-scented lips could frame. Yes, that was true, no doubt. The old man had been but a timid knave, too fearful to make a bold stroke ; but his ruffianly son doubtless was aware that his parent's brains were far better than his—that accounted for all.

"Now, Huller, my man," said Mr. Marsh rising, "of course I shall say nothing to the authorities up there"—jerking his thumb to indicate the workhouse—"of the very objectionable company in which I found you. But there are two things on which I insist—first, you must let me know when your son leaves the place ; and secondly, while he stays, you must keep sober. When you drink—to excess, I mean—your tongue gets loosened, and I don't choose that your engaging son should know anything of the slight service you rendered me some few years since ; you understand ?"

Yes, fawning Huller understood. He wished,

or at least he said so, that he might be struck dead if he blabbed a word that might vex his generous patron. And would Mr. Marsh kindly condescend—an old man wanted many little comforts which a workhouse did not supply? Whereupon, Mr. Marsh, with a very bad grace, gave Huller a sovereign, and the interview ended.

“That fellow may be useful. Who knows? He would cut a throat for small pay, or I have studied Lavater to little purpose.” Thus ran the stream of Mr. Marsh’s thoughts, as he strode homewards. “I must work with such tools as I can get. So much the worse for him, if he drives me to use them.” And he smiled a grim smile, that was worse, and more wicked, than a frown.

What were Huller’s meditations, it matters little; but he, too, slunk away with an evil smile upon his face; in his case, rather a smile of cunning than of resentment. “Pretty nearly dry,” he chuckled to himself, as he felt, with loving touch, the sovereign in the left-hand pocket of his pepper-and-salt waistcoat. “When the lemon’s quite dry, we shall try a new game, doctor!”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NURSERY OF ST. PAGANS.

GOOD workmen, says the proverb, do not quarrel with their tools—a rule which, unless all improvements originate with the bad workmen, should have kept us still in the “stone age,” with flint knives and bone arrow-heads. And although it is true that great results may be wrought out with scanty means, as when some poor half-naked Hindu jeweller, with his bamboo blowpipe and clumsy instruments, elaborates massive bangles and fairy chains, such as all the appliances at the command of European goldsmiths would fail to supply, there are tools with which it is hard not to quarrel—not tools of iron, or steel, or brass, indeed ; nothing that can be ground and sharpened, and pointed and filed, and polished with emery and chamois leather, but tools of flesh and blood, with wills

of their own, and souls of their own, for ever disturbing the calculations, and troubling the repose of the employer.

These flesh-and-blood tools, these fellow-creatures who do the bidding of a master—and the name is never given save to those whose task is to do evil for another's gain—have always been among the worst stumbling-blocks of statecraft. They have a terrible tendency to wound the hand that guides them, to recoil upon their owner, to prove fatal to him who wields them, like the Dwarf's Sword in the Saga. They renew the weird stories of those wretched men, sold to the Fiend, to whom the insatiable familiar demon came night after night, week after week, year after year, crying: "Work, master, work!—give me my task, or I rend thee limb from limb!" Even a Borgia cannot always break the instruments that have done their vile task, and have grown dangerous. There were two men on that pleasant English south coast where Shellton-on-Sea nestled, and St. Pagans stood lofty on its cliff, who began to learn this bitter lesson in a practical way—Mr. Marsh and Lord Ulswater.

It has been seen how Lord Ulswater treated Mr. Marsh, and how Mr. Marsh in turn treated Huller, the pauper ward-master, gate-porter, or whatever else he might have been at Shellton workhouse. Both men acted on the self-same principle, that which the beast-tamer never dares to forget, as he moves, carrying his life in his hand, amid a cageful of those grim paws and jaws and gleaming eyes, by help of which he earns his bread. The same rule that a man must bear in mind if his dangerous livelihood be won by fearless self-exposure among brutes that hunger for his flesh and thirst for his blood, of necessity guides one who has human tools to manage. Keep the mastery 'over lion, and tiger, and panther, and they are but so many Great Cats, after all, ready to leap at your bidding, and to crouch and serve you for a footstool. So also with unscrupulous men and women; but these are the harder to understand, and hence the harder to deal with.

The peer and the surgeon had, each in his own way, asserted with complete success a certain amount of authority over an instrument, and had been prompt to nip rebellion in the

bud. Could the shade of Macchiavelli have hovered over Shellton-on-Sea and its neighbourhood, no doubt but that the diplomatic spectre would have smiled a dark smile of approval on the superior tactics of Lord Ulswater. He had been firm in fact, but not insolent in manner. Never to cause needless irritation, never to pique and vex, to deal no light blows, but to wait till the stroke can crush—such were cardinal points of worldly wisdom ages before the great Florentine secretary wore swaddling-clothes. Mr. Marsh, on the other hand, had been brutal in his outspoken scorn for *his* satellite; and though old Huller had grovelled, morally, in the dust before his sneering censor, it was not at all wise to inflict unnecessary pain. It is not well to be hated, and especially not well to be hated gratis.

But John, Lord Ulswater, as he paced to and fro among the lonely rooms of the uninhabited portion of the abbey, was by no means easy in his mind as to the sageness of the part which he had elected to play. Once and again the doubt recurred to him, that he had been wrong in dealing so sternly with Mr. Marsh. Whatever

the nature of the bond between the bankrupt tenant of Number eight Cavendish Terrace and himself, he could not deny to himself that to make the surgeon his enemy would be, not suicidal, for he might weather the storm, but a perilous folly. He had been hasty, perhaps, in rejecting the man's petition, ungraciously preferred, it was true, but not wholly unreasonable, to be granted a new start in life. He knew Mr. Marsh to be a clever man, learned, adroit, not too heavily ballasted with scruples to climb by back-stairs influence, or to make each fresh family confidence a stepping-stone whereby to rise. His ambition was not unnatural. He was a better doctor than scores of West-end oracles were. The dole of a little money, grudgingly given, thanklessly taken, was but a poor hold upon the allegiance of a man of Marsh's stamp, a man who, even in his degradation, felt the fierce thrill of imprisoned genius stinging him like Io's gadfly. "After all," said Lord Ulswater to himself, with a low laugh of mockery—"after all, my best chance might be to let the dog become Sir Stephen Marsh, Baronet and Royal Physician. He

would have given bail, then, for his discretion. A golden padlock of fees would close his mouth famously. Gratitude, they say, means a lively sense of benefits to come. Well, if I try Marsh with a little of the sunshine that makes the traveller in the fable drop the cloak that he had held fast in rain and wind—yes, but I forgot the rust of drink that has eaten into him—too deep, perhaps—would it were deeper still, and that he were drowned in liquor, like Clarence.”

With a momentary expression of disgust upon his handsome, clear-cut face, Lord Ulswater dismissed the subject. We are all inclined to bear with peculiar severity upon vices that tempt us not, and the gross excitement caused by excessive drinking was a swinish joy not likely to meet with much sympathy from John Carnac. The reformation of Mr. Marsh might or might not be possible, but at any rate my Lord had other matters to think of, other projects to pursue, other dangers to avert. There was one foe of whom he knew, compared with whom Marsh, let him do his worst, was but a very harmless reptile, a foe not to be bribed, or bought, or wearied out, or cajoled—but she was far away,

beyond thousands of miles of the salt sea, on the other side of the world.

Some reminiscence, connected, it may be, with that distant and unseen source of peril, guided Lord Ulswater's wandering steps to that part of the disused wing of the abbey which abutted most nearly on the inhabited portion of the house. Here, before the door of a room, he stopped, laid his grasp upon the handle, and stood hesitating. "Yet, why not?" he asked himself peevishly; and with a violent jerk, he threw the door open, went in, and shut it. "I forgot that it would be dark," he said, in the same petulant tone as before, a tone very unlike that of his ordinary voice, and he made a movement towards the door, but instantly turned back, setting his teeth hard, and frowning slightly, as if angry with himself. Then he stood motionless, waiting until his eyes should become accustomed to the darkness. It was dark because the shutters were closed, and because the curtains were drawn, but it was not the utter blackness of a cave or a cellar; it was rather like the cool dim chiaro-oscuro in which the sun-dreading Italians love to keep their

large marble-floored saloons during the dog-days ; and by slow degrees Lord Ulswater was able to distinguish the objects around him.

One by one they rose before his vision, as if seen in the magic glass of some enchanter, the outlines of the inanimate things amid which he stood. The chairs, the sofa, the tables, the presses and cumbrous chests of drawers, stood out clearly against the background of shadow. Last of all the great bed, with its heavy hangings, its carved posts, its fringed canopy, became discernible amid the gloom. A gloomy bed, but a splendid one, for the nursery of St. Pagans was not as other nurseries, no mere clean, cheerful, airy room, where young children might prattle and play, happy in the fresh joy of space and light: it was a room of sullen, dull magnificence, in which a sovereign of England had slept, in right royal pomp, but where childish joy, and childish sport, and the light life of childhood, found little countenance from the surroundings. Here Guy, who should have been Lord Ulswater, had lived, and here he had died.

Yes, here, on that bed, had died the infant

son of Reginald, Baron Ulswater. His death, or the hour before his death, Lady Harriet, his great-aunt, had described to Ruth Morgan. This was the very room. There, beside the table, in the great chair, no doubt, had sat the boy's nurse, that beautiful, fierce, reserved young woman—she whom the Honourable John Carnac had recommended to his brother's service as his nephew's attendant—that steady, careful waiting-maid, whose strange likeness to the Hebrew Jael that slew Sisera, Lady Harriet Ashe had taken to heart so keenly. Yes, there she had sat, watchful, in her dark beauty, a lithe young panther, and that lamb so nigh.

He stood in his uncle's way, the helpless boy who should have worn the Ulswater coronet. He was weak Reginald's son. He had no mother, only good, stiff Lady Harriet, whose devotion was to the sickly father, not to the rosy child that had so little a breathing-time in this our world. He died—died—died. Reginald, Baron Ulswater, a feeble, frail-bodied lord, who grew weaker, as others grow stronger, year after year, died too ; and John Carnac had the rank and the lands.

Yes, there was a grand old bed, with its embossed coronet and the Carnac arms—won on a bloody battlefield—in dead gold ; and the tapestry-work done by deft and patient fingers, long since turned to dust, bone and flesh of them ; and the hangings of gorgeous brocade, wrought, perhaps, when Mary of Burgundy was princess over the looms of Ghent ; and the woodwork done by artists who had worked for the rich monasteries of unreformed England. There it was. Under that coronet, under that escutcheon, beneath the gold and silk of the canopy, the child had died.

John, Lord Ulswater, stood gazing on this stately couch with eyes that never wavered, proud, hard, pitiless. The great sorrow that had shortened the life of his ailing elder brother, the beautiful child's death, had been a gain to the heir of title and estate—no doubt of that. But it was a sad heritage. The bright glorious youth, of whom most men and all women said that it was pity he were not head of the House, was now its chief, but it was a great shipwreck of fond hopes that had landed him in his place of honour.

The nursery at St. Pagans was now a room held accursed—not wholly, no doubt, because the child had drawn its last breath there, though that, with its effect on Reginald, Lord Ulswater, so soon to follow, had been the immediate cause. But there had been other deaths in that room; other deeds were rumoured to have been done there, crimes of long-ago, sufferings of the old, cruel, shameful past, had taken place within those four walls. A strange half-crazed cynic was he, the Wicked Lord, who first made this ex-royal chamber the nursery of St. Pagans. No one ever came to this sad room, save only the housekeeper on her monthly tour of inspection, with her rustling silks and her prim cap, and her squadron of maids at her heels, ready, with besom and duster, and brush of feathers, to keep the rooms free at least from the spider. There were no spiders in the haunted nursery—not a gossamer-line of cobweb spanned the space from cornice to chimney-piece or from wainscot to floor. But the girls who did the work were always uneasy and frightened, peering over their shoulders, cowardly, even in the noonday sunshine, and reluctant to be left alone. They

could brush away the cobwebs and the dust, but they could not clear away the dark memories that clung, batlike, to the dim old room.

“Ay, there he died. Pity, too—so fair a child—no elf-changeling like his father—had he been mine!” John, Lord Ulswater’s voice, always rich and powerful grew sweet and mournful as he concluded. He stood quite still, looking at the bed with the brocaded curtains and rich escutcheon. He looked long and steadily, and by the working of his face it might have been thought that there rose before him, not merely the empty bed and the heraldic device, but the child’s face, worn by illness, but frank and bold to the last—a bright lovely face, with the curls clustering thickly about the broad white brow. There the child had lain, beneath the proud escutcheon of his race. There, at the table, had the nurse watched and waited, the lithe, dark, beautiful creature, whom the household of St. Pagans knew as Mrs. Emma Fletcher.

Lord Ulswater turned on his heel at last; slowly, and with no sign of discomposure, he turned to go. Without any unseemly hurry or

hesitation, he left the room. On the broad shallow steps of the grand staircase, he paused. "Was John so very vile?" he said sneeringly. "Young Arthur, no doubt, should have been King of England, Duke of Normandy, Bretagne, and the rest. But—— Ah! it was a great prize. I suppose my namesake thought it worth the keeping. I suppose I am like him somehow."

Yet an impartial observer might have thought that John Carnac, Baron Ulswater, looked more like Richard of the Lion-heart than like the cruel, cowardly, under-sized John of England, as he went slowly down the great staircase. And how can we be sure that Richard, flower of chivalry, hero of romaunt, robber, ravisher, homicide, no less than knight-errant, poet, and minstrel, would have been true liegeman and faithful protector to a boy-nephew!

Something of the old ruthless spirit must have been shining in Lord Ulswater's eyes as he stood on the last step of the stairs, and met Miss Morgan, leaning on her maid's arm, as usual, face to face; for she started and changed

colour, for all her usage of society and its steady discipline of the emotions. There are very stately gentlemen who walk Bond Street and Pall Mall, and who have something of the unscrupulous nature of their old sea-roving ancestors—a dash of the Viking—yet left in them, that only peeps out on abnormal occasions—a Cremorne row, a prize-fight, perhaps a hanging, possibly a stormy debate and mutinous division in the House—but now and then the ancient Adam, the antique throat-cutting, house-burning, bucaneeering instinct lifts its head from under a load of civilisation.

Probably, for an instant, while Lord Ulswater was yet under the influence of his recent thoughts, there may have been something in his face that could not have failed to strike and startle so quick and keen an observer as Ruth Morgan; but it was gone in a moment. The cold, precise frost of conventionality, the wonderful elastic mask that we all wear, from the nursery to the grave, closed over the rift that had betrayed John Carnac's inner nature, as a sudden cracking of the crater-lip shows the dull crimson, the vivid scarlet, the bright yellow, of the fires within.

“I have been among the ghosts, Miss Morgan,” said Lord Ulswater smiling, and kind as ever: “I like to look at the old rooms now and then.—Shall you drive?—No.—Then can I do anything for you, or say anything to our friends at Shellton Manor?”

CHAPTER XVIII.

DEALS WITH FLORA HASTINGS.

THERE is something to be said, perhaps, in favour of the Mohammedan canon which forbids all courtship before marriage. Some poetical or philosophical apologist for harem-life—Lord Levant, for instance, or Captain Hadji—might work the mine of thoughts therein suggested with much plausibility and profit. The honest, downright plan of wife-buying, of making large presents to the parents of an unseen maiden, whose very photograph is to us as a sealed book, and whose charms we must take on trust from the report of some old female wedding-broker, has some merits of its own: it saves trouble; it prevents accidents. There is no risk that eligible suitors, men who can, like the Roderigo of Shakspeare, put money in their purse, should be jockeyed by odious detrimental or thwarted

by feminine caprice. The money is paid, the sweetmeats and sherbets are got ready, the lambs are roasted whole, and lo! to the sound of drum, and fife, and cymbal, amid howling of women and banging of gongs, the bride is escorted in great state and dignity to the house of her future husband, the Mollah reads the half-dozen Koran verses, and there is an end of the matter.

It would have been well, at any rate, for the rich and envied young gentleman now canvassing the independent electors of Oakshire, if such oriental practices had prevailed in the England of Queen Victoria; for surely, in that case, Fortunatus Morgan, armed cap-à-pie in armour of pure gold, could have had nothing to fear from the opposition of earthly rival; his heavy purse must have turned the scale as well as the strong sword of Brennus could have done. All would have gone as he should wish, until at last the happy day should come, and bring with it, amid salvoes of matchlocks, showers of rockets, and shouts of a multitude of kibaub-loving parasites, the gilded litter of the bride, to be borne triumphant to her new home.

But matters do not always proceed, in our British marriage-market, quite so smoothly as might be wished. The discipline is not so perfect, the etiquette less strict, and human hearts and human wills assert themselves, now and then, to the distress of wise old heads and the bewilderment of giddy young ones. Accidents, as we knew, even before the dawn of Mr. Tupper's verse, cannot be wholly eliminated from the routine of even the most respectable of families.

So William Morgan was away, winning the suffrages of county electors, and meanwhile the treasure to keep which he would have given half his wealth lay unguarded to invite the spoiler—unguarded in fact, though not in theory, for, in addition to that poor little dragon, Ruth Morgan, who was zealous but powerless, were there not other dragons, who had teeth and talons wherewith to do battle, and who ought not to have been blind to the danger so near at hand? The Right Honourable Robert and his experienced wife were not the sort of simple, unworldly parents who think no evil because their lines have been cast in pleasant

places and among humdrum folks. But it came to much the same thing. They were deaf and blind in their worldliness, secure in their own deep knowledge of those around them, and if they had a fear, it was of some change in Fortuniatus Morgan, not in their daughter. "If the fellow dared!" the Right Honourable Robert had said one day, in answer to an obscure hint from his wife that perhaps their son-in-law elect might be immeshed in other silken fetters than those of Flora Hastings, should he stay too long away, exposed to the wiles of the artful matchmakers of Oakshire—"if the fellow dared!" The minister did not conclude his threat; but his angry voice, and angry eye, and the sudden swelling of the big veins on the wrinkled forehead, were as perfectly intelligible to Mrs. Hastings as if he had spoken to the extent of four columns of small print. In truth, it would have been a rash act in such a one as William Morgan to play fast and loose with his engagement with a young lady whose father was knit in the strictest bonds of red tape and blood-relationship to the governing families of England. Such a step would be, politically,

the cutting of his own throat. Mr. Hastings—the Right Honourable Robert Drummond Eliot Hastings—knew well enough what engines he could set in motion to crush the parvenu pretender to a leadership in the councils of England, should the latter be mad enough to offer such an insult to the caste of high hereditary placemen.

But it did not occur to Flora's parents to watch Flora herself. The girl was a good girl, so they averred, in tones of quiet self-congratulation, not one of those troublesome young women who gave their chaperons anxiety. There was that poor Countess of Stilton, for instance, always tormented by the difficult necessity for doing her duty by skittish Lady Annabel, whose infatuation for penniless, characterless Tom Jekyl, once of the Rifle Brigade, but now vehemently suspected of living on his talents at *écarté* and on the turf, had caused immense amusement to the wicked world, and annoyance to the noble family. There was Lady Laura Madcap, who had actually eloped with her music-master, but who, by great good-luck, had been overtaken by her brother, in consequence

of an opportune break-down of the train that was bearing the truants Gretna-wards. The evil example of these young persons was not likely to be followed by a girl of Flora's excellent principles and docile nature, of that her parents were assured.

Meanwhile, Lord Ulswater's visits, rare at first, had become frequent, and at last constant, so that very much of his time was passed at Shellton Manor. The transition, though rapid, had been gradual. It had seemed so natural that the intimacy between the families of Carnac and Hastings should increase with the opportunities for easy intercourse which country-life affords to those who in the whirlpool of London fashion can seldom meet, that no one wondered that the owner of St. Pagans should be continually at Shellton.

Flora Hastings could hardly have been in more dangerous society than that of her neighbour from the abbey. Handsomer men, even, than John Carnac, younger men to a certainty, and such as were reputed more fascinating, she had known and danced with in London, and not one of them had had the power to touch her

heart. But she was not in London now—she had left the quick, hurrying round of pleasures, so thickly crowded together that they ceased to be pleasures, and became parts of a task that never seemed to end. Then the constant succession of new faces, each of which appeared to blot out the memory of its predecessor, prevented her thoughts from dwelling on any individual image. So her engagement had been rendered possible.

She was going to marry—she hardly knew why, but she believed that it was her duty so to act—she was going to marry Mr. William Morgan. He was very rich. That fact had been dinned into her ears so very frequently, that she could never divest her lover from a sort of golden haze that clung to him whenever she looked at him, and through which he loomed, as Midas might have done, auriferous, cash-compelling. He was a good young man, virtuous, well-principled, excellent in every relation of life—so Flora Hastings had been told, though with less iteration than when the all-engrossing topic of wealth gave loose to her mother's tongue. Obviously, to be good was held an

easier matter than to be rich. Had William Morgan been poor, he might have eclipsed the virtues of St. Anthony without being deemed worthy of much mention. But he had lands and beeves, he had scrip and shares, and stock and debentures. No imagination could quite soar to the tremendous total of his wealth. Being so very rich, it was a crowning merit in him to be so very good. He was not personally disagreeable. Flora liked him, respected him, and perhaps liking and respect are better foundations than those which prop up some fashionable marriages.

We manage those matters better in England than they did in Circassia, before Russia made an end of the poor Tcherkesses. They said, those Caucasian fathers and mothers : " Amina, my dear, there is an offer for thee. Thou art bought and sold, my child, and Backsheesh Pasha is the purchaser." But we of the polite western world do better than that. We do not say : " Dora, my love, you have been knocked down to the bid of young Corncocks, or young Smallcole, or old Sheepshanks the Australian squatter, who has a quarter of a million of

muttons grazing upon government land rented at a farthing an acre"—no; we are wiser in our generation. We point out the merits, pecuniary and personal, of young Corncobs, or young Smallcole, or that dear Sheepshanks, and hint not obscurely at our own displeasure, anger, affliction, if Dora is not ready to love, honour, and obey either of the three. It is her duty—her duty—and we wax awfully stern and impressive, and Dora is brow-beaten, hocussed, frightened, bribed into forgetting young Charley, the briefless barrister-cousin; and she goes up with six bridemaids to the altar, and is Mrs. Sheepshanks of Gashalunga, of Lostacres, in the county of Hants, and of Eaton Square, thenceforth and for ever.

So it was the duty of Flora Hastings to be the wife of William Morgan.

But William Morgan was away—and there was John, Lord Ulswater, ever at Shellton—handsome, glorious, grand John Carnac, king of fashion, almost the champion of his party, the man for whom hopeful prophets predicted a name that should last as long as our English language should endure to record it. When he

spoke, a thrill ran through her. When he touched her hand, it trembled like a bird, timid, but joyful in its fearful love. The sound of his rich voice sent a tremor through her that she had never, never felt before. The glance of his eye had a magic that she learned now, for the first time, the old, world-old magic, that has made millions feel as Flora Hastings felt now. Yes, William Morgan was away, canvassing Oakshire, and the girl whom he valued more than fifty county constituencies was thinking by day and dreaming by night of John, Lord Ulswater.

CHAPTER XIX.

A RECOGNITION.

"POLICE are traps, are they, Billy, my boy? traps, eh? Then quite right and proper on your part, William, to come down and rusticate in the country for a while; and dutiful, too, to remember your father and your native place," said, or, more correctly, hiccoughed, the old pauper, Huller *père*, tinkling the tea-spoon against the sides of his nearly empty tumbler. Mr. Huller had obtained leave of absence from his parochial duties; it was easy for a man like himself, a member, so to speak, of the Uncovenanted Civil Service of his parish work-house, to obtain such leave. And he was spending the golden summer afternoon, much to his taste, in imbibing strong liquors, to be paid for by his hopeful son, at the sign of the *Three Jolly Fishermen*.

The *Three Jolly Fishermen*, the dusky effigies of whom, swinging on iron hooks above the outer door, had been so battered and maltreated by age and rough weather, as to present few discernible features beyond one red cap and a villainous leering face beneath it, was not a house of very good repute. It was one of those hostelries, at mention of which, on licensing-day, the assembled magistrates shook their heads and hesitated to renew, but did renew in spite of their hesitation, because the tavern belonged to the local brewer, and the local brewer was of the quorum. A low-browed, ugly little public it was, very old, yet promising, like some surly little old man with broad back and bowed shoulders, to outlive many younger and more graceful compeers. Its heavy beams, stout walls of flint stone and hard mortar, and small windows with little panes set in lead, behind which were thin red curtains, gave it a character of its own quite alien to that of the modern gin-shop, with its brightly painted casks and its ostentatious plate-glass.

In the tap of this delectable house of entertainment there were no customers but young

Huller and old Huller. The house did a good business, but almost entirely at night; and in fine weather and the summer season it was only on cattle-market days that there was any influx of company before sundown. To quote, however, the language of the landlord of the *Three Jolly Fishermen* himself, "all was fish" that came to his ready net. Welcome were thirsty drovers, thirsty mariners from collier brigs beached on Shellton shingle, thirsty soldiers from the Shellton barracks, tramps, trawlers, hawkers, harvestmen, and foreigners of the organ-grinding art and mystery. One touch of nature—that is to say, thirst, and such thirst as required to be slaked with excisable drinks—made the whole world kin to the landlord of the *Three Jolly Fishermen*, on the one condition, that the thirsty soul should be solvent.

Mr. William Huller was solvent. Work, in his peculiar line of business, may or may not have been "slack," according to the assurance which his glib parent had given to his patron Mr. Marsh, but the younger man had money, and he stood treat most munificently to the author of his days. A strange sight to the

moralist or the cynic would that parent and child have presented, had Asmodeus just then treated some philosophical Cleophas to a peep at the taproom of the *F'ishermen*.

Old Huller was tipsy and maudlin, but cunning in his cups. It is the fashion to talk of seasoned vessels, as if any man were the less likely to get drunk because he had been drunk a few hundred times before. But, at any rate, Huller senior was not one of these case-hardened toppers. He might more aptly have been likened to a sponge soaked in gin, a very moderate additional supply of alcohol sufficing to produce complete saturation. But there was craft in his watery eyes, craft in the furtive twist of his hooked nose, in the expression of his mean mouth; and he seemed, in his senile intoxication, rather to be looking out for some one to cheat than to be off his guard for the time.

The strong, bull-necked fellow sitting on the opposite side of the table was not drunk. A little flushed, perhaps, a little boastful; but not more so than thousands of gentlemen who have "dined," and found their tongues loosened by the process, but who would justly and indignantly

rebut the accusation of drunkenness. William Huller was not the slave of strong waters, or, at least his serfdom was not so confirmed as that of his papa, or even of Mr. Marsh, his papa's patron. And, besides, he was keeping sober for a purpose. It was his wish to draw his parent out, and make him talk freely on the subject of that very patron; and in his simple strategy he could find no better Open Sesame to apply to the parental lips than hot gin-and-water in copious draughts.

There was a wonderful contrast between the two men, notwithstanding the family-likeness that Mr. Marsh had remarked, a gulf between them not to be bridged, such as can hardly exist except between the taught and the untaught. Old Huller had been educated. Young Huller had studied criminal lore in the hulks, and had graduated at the Old Bailey. The old man, even in his degradation, had thoughts and theories at mention of which the young man could only have stared or laughed. The senior was a bad, crooked-minded old rogue, but he had read books with relish and understanding. The junior was a dull, passionate, small-brained savage, with a sort of brutish scorn for the

culture that the learned set such store by. As the younger Huller sat fronting his father, he would have served an artist as an admirable model for some picture of the coarser type of Roman gladiator, strong-limbed, deep-chested, with stern resolution on his scarred face, a muscular fighting animal sure to show sport in the arena.

The dutiful son making no reply to his father's chuckling commentary on some recent revelation from the former, Old Huller drank off the small quantity of gin-and-water that his glass contained, heaved a little sigh, and tinkled the spoon against the tumbler till it rang like a shrill but tiny bell. The founder of the feast took the hint, and summoning the potboy from his Domitian-like pastime of killing bluebottle flies in the front parlour, ordered fresh glasses, and gulped down a portion of his own half-consumed tumblerful. Then, when the steaming liquor arrived, and the shirt-sleeved Ganymede was gone again, the younger man spoke, in an amicable growl :—

“He's a queer customer, that doctor chap we met. You know him well, don't you? He

seemed to order you about pretty much as if he were captain of the gang, didn't he, dad?"

'Yes, Billy, yes; he is a little arbitrary, perhaps, is the doctor. But then he's workhouse medical officer, remember, and I'm only a poor man that the Guardians could turn out of his berth to-morrow without reason given. Of course, I must humour 'em, William; mustn't I humour 'em, eh?" was the pauper's reply; and he sucked in a fresh dose of his favourite medicine, eyeing his son the while with a sort of stealthy enjoyment.

The scarred face began to darken. Young Huller was growing weary of the task of pumping his affectionate parent for information that was never forthcoming. There had he been ever since the mid-day meal, toiling morally at the crank, and none the wiser was he for his trouble and his hospitality. He broke out in his more wonted way: "Look here, old man"—and as he said it, he slapped the table violently with his heavy hand, making the spoons and glasses clatter—"look you here. I did come down to Shellton to keep snug, and maybe I wasn't sorry to have the chance of

shaking hands with you again, dad; though hang me if I know why. You know best what sort of a father you were to me——”

“On principle, William, on principle. I always tried, my dear boy, to develop in your young mind the spirit of self-reliance and manly energy,” interrupted the elder, cringing before his son almost as he had cringed before Mr. Marsh.

“If leaving a kid to shit for itself, and go to the devil its own way, if that’s principle—sink your principles!” said Huller *filis* very savagely, and with a strong imprecation and another sounding slap upon the table. “However, that’s nouthar here nor there. I’m what I am, and you’re what you are, and now for business. Don’t try to gammon me about that doctor. There’s something wrong, a screw loose somewhere, and he pays you for holding your tongue; that’s about it, isn’t it?”

“You are a conjuror, Billy—on my word, you are a conjuror,” said old Huller, winking and wagging his unhonoured gray head, as he lifted the tumbler to his lips. But he presently perceived that his son’s determined face was

waxing very stern indeed, and as it was his nature to bow, reedlike, to the blast of human anger, he made haste to mollify his sullen offspring. With engaging frankness he avowed that there was, yes, a reason why Mr. Marsh should notice him, Benjamin Huller. He obscurely hinted that he had rendered services to Mr. Marsh, which services had not been adequately compensated. He deplored his patron's ingratitude, but gave him credit on account of the temporary narrowness of the doctor's means. But patience had its limits, and there was, the pauper protested, a "party" in the background, a party well able to pay Mr. Marsh's debts of honour, if only a proper screw were put upon that monied individual. Finally, old Huller mentioned that he had a plan, or as he called it, in language more familiar to the listener's ear, "a plant—a very pretty plant indeed," maturing in his own wily brain; and should this seedling of Mr. Huller's wits come to perfection, the inventor pledged himself with a great oath that his dear boy Bill should have a part to perform, and a liberal share of the profits, called, for brevity, the swag. More than this, Mr. Huller would not say.

“And now, Bill, tell me something about yourself. How did they use you over there?” said Mr. Huller in smooth tones, jerking his thumb backwards over his shoulder as if to indicate Bermuda, Gibraltar, Western Australia, or any other place of enforced retirement for the criminal classes.

“Like a dog!” growled the strong man, with a very doglike snarl upon his coarse mouth. “Life aboard them hulks is enough to make any man into a sort of bated bull. Break the rules — irons and bread and water. Give a knock-down blow to a warder that nags your very heart out—the cat, and four dozen well laid on. So much as look black at an officer—cat again! They weren’t half so bad, nor a quarter of it, out in Western Australia; a chap might keep out of trouble there.”

“You were at the diggings, too, lad, after your time was worked out?” said old Huller inquiringly. “You never told me whether you did well at the gold.”

But it appeared from such disconnected scraps of his free Australian experiences as the amiable Huller, junior, could be induced to impart, that

he had been more of the bushranger than of the miner, and had found the gun or revolver more congenial to his taste than the pick and cradle. "Jumping a claim," he once or twice alluded to, certainly; and it seemed to have been the nearest approach to legitimate enterprise that dwelt in his recollection, unless a "grand grog-store in the bush," with its enviable facilities for houcussing successful diggers, might be regarded in the same light. But the principal portion of Bill's regrets had reference to a certain promising scheme for "bailing up" the gold escort on its way to the capital, and which had failed through the treachery of one of the projectors.

"You've had a knock or two, William; a slice of the knife, too, if I'm not mistaken?" said his father, nodding blinkingly at the scars on the younger man's bronzed face.

"What o' that?" responded Bill defiantly. "I gave as good as I got, anyway. Look at this," pointing to a dull crimson blotch, perilously near the right eye; "a darned black fellow thrust his fire-stick in my face. He meant to fire the hut, and there were a whole mob of the yelling black brutes at his heels, with spears and

tomahawks, thinking to rush us four white men. We licked 'em. I brained that chap with his own tomahawk, him that burned that mark on me," pursued the ex-convict, evidently pleased by the reminiscence. "This knife-mark was done by a pal in a grog-store. We had a big drink and got quarrelling. This other, a mere scratch, I got in Bermuda from a warder's cutlass. Those two marks"—laying his finger on two small white dints below the left temple—"one of the Australian police did that with the but-end of his carbine. It came very near cracking my skull, so the doctor said; but there warn't one of them fellows, policemen or not, that had any cause to boast they beat Bendigo Bill."

"That's what they called you, William?" said old Huller caressingly.

"That's what they called me. And I'm not ashamed of it," said his son gruffly, as if to challenge contradiction.

Still it was evident that the younger man was proud of his scars, as a Comanche warrior might be of the scalps on his tent-pole, and therefore his father, with an eye to more gin-and-water,

as well as an instinctive wish to keep the present company in good-humour, resumed the subject of the son's prowess. "You always were plucky, William, and a good one with your fists when you were only as high as sixpenny-worth of halfpence. You've kept the game alive since you've been at home, I should say, by the look of that beauty mark—it's not half healed yet." And the old pauper pointed to a livid streak, newer than the rest, on his son's forbidding countenance: "That on the right cheek-bone. Who did that?"

Up rose Bendigo Bill in a fury, upsetting his glass as he did so, and clutching his astonished sire by the collar of his pepper-and-salt coat, shook the old man till the teeth chattered in his head, as fiercely, abruptly, and vehemently as a bull-terrier shakes a rat. "What do you mean by that, you old sinner? Who told you of that?" thundered the ex-convict, with a running accompaniment of oaths, such as only those who have taken their degree in the criminal universities could hope to improvise. But it presently became plain to the dull, angry man that his parent's question had been a guileless one; that

the aged pauper was really quite innocent of any sarcastic meaning in his remarks. With something that was not an apology—for men of Bendigo Bill's stamp never apologise—but which more resembled the expiatory process of swearing at himself, the dutiful son relaxed his grip of the pepper-and-salt coat, and old Huller, half choked, carried the tumbler to his lips with an unsteady hand.

"Never mind, lad. I'm not hurt," he said timorously.

"The man that did that," rejoined Bendigo Bill, after a pause, and speaking with a ferocious energy that made him almost eloquent, "he and I have got, yet, to square our accounts, and we'll do it when we meet again; never doubt what I say. He took me unawares, that stuck-up, white-handed swell; but I'll be even with him yet, if it's in court, before My Lord Judge and the whole boiling of 'em. I'll swing for that man, but I'll be revenged."

It was a singular proof of how very much the ruffian was in earnest, that he swore no oath, but simply said his say. In common discourse, his talk was garnished with strong expressions, such

as Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim may have listened to in leaguer before Namur, and the full force of which he probably no more realized than ordinary folks think of the etymology of the words they employ. But in his concentrated thirst for revenge, he forgot the expletives so often on his untutored tongue.

A long, awkward interval of silence, only interrupted by the tinkling signals of distress which the senior occasionally ventured to make with his empty glass and spoon, and then the redoubted Bendigo Bill spoke again.

"I am going out," he said bluntly; "I shall take a stroll, and think what to do. You had better go to sleep. I'll tell them to let you lie quiet for an hour or two; and when you've slept off the drink, you'd better get back to the workhouse. I'll drop in before dark. No, dad; no more gin, if you rattle that spoon ever so much. You've had as much as is good for you, I reckon."

So, leaving his papa to pass from the domains of Bacchus into those of Morpheus, and considerably giving instructions at the bar of the *Three Jolly Fishermen* that the old man should

be "let lie" as long as might be needful, this model son quitted the beetling doorway of the public-house, and, with his hands in his pockets, made his sauntering way through the by-streets of Shellton, and so towards the sea. Hot gin-and-water in the early part of a sultry summer afternoon is not generally recommended by the Faculty as a clearer of the brains, or a beneficial tonic to the nervous and circulatory system. But the ex-convict's health was perfect. He had one of those strong bodies that it takes time to wear out by contempt for the physical laws; and, moreover, he had been so much in prison, with the wholesome addition of hard labour, that his bodily powers were almost wholly unimpaired by alcohol swallowed during his freer moments. Sober, but brooding gloomy thoughts in his narrow mind, he strolled towards the sea.

The garotter, burglar, footpad, bushranger, and miscellaneous robber, known in the flesh as Bendigo Bill, might be acquitted of any sentimental liking for the sea, or of any enjoyment of the prospect which the dancing gold and purple of its measureless waters, glancing and sparkling in billions of ripples under a joyous

summer sun, afforded to those who cared to look with loving eyes. In truth, he hated the sea. Such men do. To them it is but the moat around their far-off prison, the highway to exile, the scene of great misery and hardship on board a convict-laden vessel. William Huller certainly threw one glance at the broad sheet of salt water, and then turned away with a growl of disgust. He had not rambled that way to admire the ocean, but because all roads at the sea-side seem to lead one's steps to the sea; and the parade was there, and the shops, and the visitors.

One group caught his eye; a pony-carriage, drawn by two pretty ponies, with a mounted groom in attendance; just one of those convenient low baskets, full of young ladies, and muslin skirts, and bewilderingly tasteful hats and plumes and veils, of which we now see so many at a watering-place. The lady who held the reins was young and very beautiful, for she was Flora Hastings, and she had brought her four-footed pets to a halt, and was talking with a tall, fair-haired young man, who leaned forward over the side of the low carriage, holding his horse by the bridle the while. Presently

they parted. The tall gentleman with fair hair lifted his hat as the pony-carriage passed on, remounted his horse, and rode slowly away. He did not see Bendigo Bill.

But Bendigo Bill saw him, and ground his teeth, and gasped for breath. It was his conqueror in Great Popplewell Street, the "swell" who had humiliated him before his fellows.

"I'll hang for that man, but I'll have my revenge," said the ruffian to himself; and as Lord Ulswater rode away, the garotter followed him with swift but stealthy steps.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WICKED WORLD.

"I'LL tell you what it is, Warburton," Captain Crashaw of the Horse Guards Blue had said, that very morning, in the billiard-room of Shellton Manor; "I'll tell you what it is—forty-two to twenty-five, cannon again, forty-four to twenty-five—if I were Fortunatus Morgan, instead of being a poor devil of a Heavy, with empty pockets—forty-six, in spite of the cushion—I should not care to have such a man as Ulswater spooning my affianced one—a winning-hazard—now again—game!" And then the captain added, very impressively: "That's between you and me!"

But Crashaw need hardly have troubled himself to bind over his young friend to silence. That pink-faced, bucolical young gentleman

from the West of England, whose chief distinction in that house it was to be merry Miss Warburton's brother, was discreet by instinct and by habit. He seldom opened his mouth but at meal-times, and even then, as he sat quietly eating, his abstinence from the sin of frivolous speaking would have endeared him to Mr. Carlyle. To the negative merit of being mute, Young Warburton, as his associates called him behind his back, added the active virtue of reverence. He had a finely-developed organ of veneration, and the object of his admiration just then was Crashaw of the Blues. He dressed after Crashaw's pattern, got introductions to Crashaw's long-suffering tradesmen, and sent them bountiful orders, paying ready money for the brilliant garments, the hats and boots, that he purchased; followed Crashaw everywhere, and gave him such simple, open-mouthed homage—rather grotesque, but touching, too, in its honest frankness—as none but a hobbledehoy could contrive to give.

No, there was not much fear lest Young Warburton should betray the captain's confidence, unless it were by way of proving to his

sister that he, Richard Warburton, knew a thing or two, and even then no great harm would have been done. There were other pairs of eyes in the house, quite as observant as those of Crashaw; and by this time, every girl there, and perhaps one or two of the married ladies, had noticed something, or had heard something, to the effect that Lord Ulswater was paying court to Flora Hastings, and that his attentions were by no means unwelcome.

However admirable may be a man's tact, its powers of dissimulation are of necessity limited, and in the long-run it is by far more easy for the innocent to be convicted of flirtation by a jury of young ladies, than for the guilty to escape indictment and trial. Lord Ulswater, who never flirted, remained free from suspicion of serious love-making for a time; but at last an awful roll of charges, based on trifling incidents of the slightest possible character, began to accumulate against him, and Shellton Manor was on the watch for further evidence.

Not Shellton Manor in the persons of its proprietors, but Shellton Manor as represented by all its younger visitors. The elder guests

were too worldly wise, or perhaps too much absorbed in their own affairs, to see anything that was not glaringly patent. The Right Honourable Robert and Mrs. Hastings saw nothing at all. This was a grave business; even the giggling girls from the distant counties, even the unrespective young men from Pall Mall, felt that. There are likings, and lovings, and preferences, that are accounted fair game for people of quizzing proclivities. The announcement that Prince Volscius, or, it may be, Princess Volscia, his sister, is in love, serves still as the cue for malicious or sportive laughter on many a domestic stage. Some unhappy wretches there are who are not permitted so much as to steal away and die, like a hurt fawn, when Cupid's arrows strike them. There are merciless persons ready to drag them forth from the covert, and to point out to all eyes how the little archer's shafts rankle in the wound, and to jeer and flout their pain, as though it were the best of jokes.

There were guests at Shellton very capable of cruelty of this sort, blithe girls, whose own hearts had never felt a pang, and whose immunity from

sentimental distress made them pitiless, as children are pitiless, because they have not yet learned the freemasonry of suffering. And perhaps one or two of the men, and one or two of the married ladies, whose souls had been rather soured than improved by some bygone griefs of their own, as is the case with some natures, would have enjoyed a little amusement at the expense of somebody else. But Lord Ulswater was not the kind of man with whom it was prudent to take a liberty, while Miss Hastings had a quiet, unconscious dignity of bearing, which it was impossible to disregard. Moreover, there was an indistinct conviction among the members of that pleasant circle, to the effect that if a man or a woman wanted to make an enemy, John, Baron Ulswater, would be a dangerous one. But no one had so abnormal a desire ; so, if there were whisperings, outspoken words were avoided, and all went smoothly and steadily on.

Meanwhile, the persons principally concerned met daily without hindrance. Lord Ulswater, whose eagle eye seemed not seldom to have the power of reading the thoughts of those about

him, may have perceived that his frequent visits and frequent conversations with Miss Hastings were not wholly unnoticed. But Flora was blind—blind as her parents, whose serene self-sufficiency was unruffled by doubt or dread—blind as those over whose eyes the rosy-fingered urchin has tied the bandage of Paphian web. It was to her one long, delightful, sunny dream of checkered light and shade, and she was happy, and cared not to dwell much upon the past, or to think much of the future. Hers was a state of mind more common with women than with men.

Yes, Flora Hastings was happy now, for it was the period in this strange courtship when an innocent girl was able to enjoy the present the most thoroughly. Here was none of the unrest, the jealousy, the demands, the imperiousness of love, but merely a sort of halcyon voyage over peaceful, sun-gilded seas, with balmy zephyrs to fill the sails, and soft music, and a dreamy quiet of content. Men are seldom so steeped in the happiness of the present moment as women have the power to be. They look ahead for the haven instead of luxuriating

in the length of the voyage. With them there is always a to-morrow, a goal, a future, something to be struggled on to, won, secured. Their longings are fiercer and fuller than is their capacity for actual joy. It is for men to hurry and press on towards the undiscovered Eden beyond the dim blue mountain-wall afar off; it is the privilege of the other sex to rest and be thankful among the wild-flowers in some shady halting-place upon the hot and dusty road.

So Flora Hastings was happy in the immediate present, and if she remembered the future at all, she shut her eyes to it, and would not dwell upon it; she was as a sleeper who dreams a sweet celestial dream, one of those soft visions that come to visit us so seldom, and who will not without a struggle unclothe his eyes to the cold cruel morning light that comes to turn the fairy gold to withered ivy-leaves once more. Never before had she known a man like Lord Ulswater, and now she cared for him more than she dared to believe, more and more every day. Good looks, even in a man, go for something, but it was not Lord Ulswater's

handsome person that would have made prize of the heart of such a girl as Miss Hastings, thoughtful, high-bred, and accustomed to a society in which fair faces were not uncommon. Chirper of the Life Guards, for instance, was a perfect Adonis, what our grandmothers in the Ranelagh days were wont to call a "beauty man," but nobody ever fell in love with poor Chirper.

There was a magic in John Carnac's voice, a charm in the glance of his eye, rarely exerted, but which had never been resisted yet by woman. The very touch of his hand, the very turn of his proud head, bent down as he talked with her, were dear to Flora Hastings. Then what talk it was—not oratorical, not flashy or pompous, or over-fluent—but to her ear it had an eloquence that was music itself. Lord Uls-water's conversation had the rare merit of suggesting, rather than of defining, noble sentiments and bright glorious thoughts. Flora was a girl of quick feelings and strong sensibilities; she had a natural sympathy for whatever was true and good, and perhaps her own half-conscious thoughts were and had ever been less common-

place than was usual with any but clever women. She may have been clever, but if so she did not know it, nor claim any distinction on that score. But he could listen to Lord Ulswater, and be happy in listening.

Miss Hastings had the usual tendency to hero-worship that seems almost inherent in her sex ; but it is not easy, in the critical, *nil admirari* atmosphere of London society, to select a hero worth worshipping. The lions of Belgravian parties had shaken their tawny manes and roared for her benefit ; but she had always been disappointed in the quality of the roaring. Great writers, great speakers, great travellers, dreadfully clever men whose lips distilled gall and bitterness perennially, and who were feared because of their venom, as serpents are feared—all these she had seen and heard unmoved. The literary lions, she found, roared but feebly when denied the advantage of print and paper ; the orators and travellers were coarsely boastful, or dull and pretentious, or, more likely still, shy and sullen in private life, and the Mayfair cynics were mere prigs, pert, flippant, ill-natured, but not in the least amusing.

There had been lions of another sort, men whose leonine qualities had been proved—gallant soldiers who had won or merited the Cross of Valour by almost fabulous exploits against Indian mutineers. These lions, for the most part, would not roar at all, but were very quiet and simple lions, meekly enduring the laurel-wreaths with which their countrymen insisted on adorning their brave, honest heads. If they talked at all, it certainly was not of battles and rescues, but of how very hot it was in Lady Doldrum's rooms, and of the Derby and the Overland Route, and of what a bore India was, after all.

Lord Ulswater was the first, the very first man that Flora Hastings had ever felt herself able to love with the admiring, trustful adoration, the love that looks up, like a growing plant, towards the light, which is most beautiful in woman. She knew very well that he had not done much to win a name for himself in Fame's temple; but then there are some men to whom, so long as they are young, the world will consent to discount the future, to honour their bill, so to speak, upon posterity, and to give them credit for what they are going to do

whenever they shall gird themselves for hard work. There was an appearance of latent power, moral, mental, and physical, in all that Lord Ulswater said and did. The jaguar lolls on the straw-strewn floor of its cage, a lazy, great wild-cat, doing nothing *mos elaborate ly*; but we detect the closely-packed muscles hidden beneath the spotted skin, and believe what hunters tell us of the stroke and strength of that pliant forepaw.

Also there was another spell which this one man alone exercised over Flora's imagination. She had in her much of that undefined longing for excellence, to be good, and to do good, which most girls who are neither stupid nor selfish experience in the years that they pass between the schoolroom and the period of their marriage. This is a powerful influence with the young, and has sent many a nun into the living tomb of the convent, and made many a popular preacher's chapel fill to suffocation with pretty little bonnets encasing anxious, solemn little faces, pretty or plain. Now Lord Ulswater seemed able to tell her—Flora Hastings—*how* to be good and useful in the world, and to lighten the dark

places where vice and poverty brooded like evil vampires over their hereditary prey ; and he not only spoke of these things with earnestness and feeling, but without cant, which no one else had ever done. She was glad, very glad to have found a friend like him : some one who understood her.

There was some justice, certainly, in Ruth Morgan's suspicions. Here was Flora Hastings congratulating herself on having met with a male friend who understood her—and she longed for his coming, and was sorry when he left her—and she was to be Ruth's brother's wife—Mrs. Morgan of Cramlingham and Stoneham, and so on ; hereafter, it was to be hoped, Lady Cramlingham of that ilk, honoured and right honourable. A very proper marriage. Every one said so. It made her parents happy. It secured her a high place at the world's banquet. It gave her an amiable man, without any harm in him, to the best of popular belief, to be her husband. It was all very snugly, safely, irrevocably settled, and therefore the idea of it could be put aside like some valuable object, rarely used, which we keep under lock and key

till it shall be wanted. Taking her marriage for granted, then, and not caring to realize the relief she felt on account of the temporary absence of her betrothed consort, Flora was happy in the society of John Carnac, Baron Ulswater.

On the day when Bendigo Bill's eye lit upon his enemy so unexpectedly on the parade of Shellton-on-Sea, Lord Ulswater, contrary to his usual practice, had not paid his ordinary visit to Shellton Manor. He had stayed away, and his absence had caused some little remark. Flora alone had said nothing, but some of those who watched her as narrowly as politeness allowed, saw, or thought they saw, that her spirits were less equable on that morning than on others. She was thoughtful and silent, or almost feverishly excited, by turns, and Crashaw said long afterwards that when, by some accident, he had touched her hand, it was as cold as marble. How her eyes had brightened when, in the course of her afternoon drive, she had met Lord Ulswater slowly riding through the watering-place, Miss Warburton was always ready to depose; with the additional circumstance that

Flora had trembled as John Carnac sprang from his horse, and held out his hand to her. They had not said a word to one another that might not have been told in Gath, or Bath, by the town-crier himself. How could they, with Miss Warburton and Miss Tressillian sitting in the pony-carriage, and the mounted groom two yards off? If there had been a lover's quarrel, as those two young ladies afterwards averred, assuredly the reconciliation was not a verbal one. But a great deal may be said by the eyes, and by the lightest pressure of the hand; and even the common talk of lovers is full of catch-words and mysteries, as we all know, unintelligible to any but the initiated twain.

So away, at the merriest trot of her ponies, went Flora Hastings, with bright eyes and quickened breathing, and a colour mantling in her dainty cheek, for the first time that day, as her little feminine censors, with that turn for amateur detectiveship in Cupid's preserves which many young ladies have, mentioned in confidence to their other dear friends. And away rode Lord Ulswater, slowly, away from Shellton, and out into the deep lanes that scored

the hog-backed ridge of the downs on which St. Pagans stood ; and after him, with a swift step, went Bendigo Bill.

“ I’ll settle accounts with that chap now or never, if I hang for it ! ” muttered the garotter, as he kept the horseman warily in view. Bendigo Bill’s eyes were bright, too, with a light that boded no good. Lord Ulswater rode on at a walking pace into the lonely road, and Bendigo Bill followed close behind.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN THE HOLLOW WAY.

LORD Ulswater's most direct route to his home at St. Pagans was one which diverged from the white down road, along which carriages journeyed to and from the abbey. By turning sharply to the right, and plunging into the defile of a very deep and narrow lane, it was possible to save a mile of the distance. This lane, however, which was one of those peculiar to the southern maritime counties, was not one fit for any vehicle more delicately constructed than a common springless cart, and was seldom made use of, even by carters, except in dry weather. In wet weather, the mud was fetlock deep at the best, and in the ruts was supposed to be bottomless, for it was a lane the roadway of which it was no one's business to repair—dusty, uneven, strewn

with huge flint-stones washed from their chalky beds by the rains of long years.

The weather was beautifully fine and dry, and, after a moment's hesitation, Lord Ulswater turned into the lane, where the steep, high banks rose sheer, like chalk-walls, tapestried with brushwood and rank grass. Another person, a pedestrian, who had kept the rider in sight ever since he left the parade of Shellton-on-Sea, turned into the lane too, and followed, cautiously treading on the soft patches of green-sward that skirted the banks.

It was one of Lord Ulswater's peculiarities to ride out alone. Even in London, he rarely permitted the attendance of a groom. In the country, never. "Servants," he had once said at his club, the Eleusis, in one of those talkative moods to which even reticent men are now and then liable—"servants are spies. Old Q. said so, and Old Q. knew the world—or, at least, the worst part of it." Laxington had laughed, and had moved an exception in favour of yacht-stewards, as a necessary evil; and Chirper had declared himself spy-proof, as having no secrets, or power to keep them to himself if he had.

But Lord Ulswater had been serious. He liked to ride alone ; he did so now.

He rode a fine horse, bay with black points, a mettled creature fit for the park, and accustomed to the park, but very hot-tempered and troublesome for country hackwork, and that chafed a good deal at being held back, as it had been since its master left the sea-wall. But that master rode on indifferent to his steed's fretful humour, though the froth that clung to the bridle, and flecked the horse's glossy neck, and the way in which the brute tossed its head and champed at the bit, proved its restless impatience. Presently, annoyed by the flint-stones of the rough road, or snatching at some pretext for alarm, such as the rustling and chuckling scream of a blackbird in the holly hedge above, the bright bay broke out into rebellion. Not quite suddenly. The first signs of insubordination were a swerve and a plunge, and then, after a short interval, the snorting brute flung up his heels, tore at the curb, plunged again and again, more and more furiously, reared arrow-straight, and in his gathering rage fought, and foamed, and flung, reckless as the wild horse

that seeks to dislodge his captor from the saddle.

It was a pretty sight, though a fearful one, too, to sensitive persons, had such been there, to watch that hot bay thoroughbred twist and writhe his supple muscular body like a fish, rearing, lashing out savagely, buck-jumping, and throwing himself into attitudes seldom to be seen but in the rough-rider's department of a riding-school, and some of which Rosa Bonheur would have been glad to transfer to canvas. But there were no such sympathetic spectators there, no one at all save Bendigo Bill stealing along beneath the hedgerow; and even he, with all the glow of his hatred firing his blood, could not help uttering a surly snarl of unwilling admiration. "What a chap that is! The devil throttle him! I wish he'd break his neck—but he won't. I've seen fellows ride out in Australia, and I thought I knew what it was; but I never did see such a man as this in my life."

And, indeed, no stockrider, used to chase and be chased by half-wild bulls over miles of bush-leaps in the wildest part of New South Wales—none of those centaurs of the antipodes, horse-

compelling as they are, could have seemed more absolutely part and parcel of his mad, plunging steed than did Lord Ulswater. He was not vain of his riding, did not hunt above a dozen times in the season, and never deigned to "show off" as some men delight to do. But the bay might as well have tried to shake off his saddle as to unseat its occupant. Lord Ulswater backed the brute as Alexander backed Bucephalus.

"Ah, that's your sort!" ejaculated the ruffian, cowering under the shadow of the hedge, as he saw the frantic horse rear up three times in succession, his fore-feet pawing the air, and each time more and more perilously. "Ah, now you've got it!"—and as the fellow spoke, after a vain effort to recover himself, crash! the rearing horse fell back with dreadful violence upon the road—"now you've got it!"

But Lord Ulswater had not "got it," in the sense of the old Latin phrase, *Habet*, which Bendigo Bill had unwittingly quoted. It was only the horse that had gone crashing backwards, and it was the empty saddle that had resounded with so dead and hollow a thud upon the flinty roadway. Active, cool, and watchful, Lord

Ulswater had sprung to the ground as the horse reared for the last time, and he stood unhurt upon the turf. The animal lay half-stunned, and Lord Ulswater stooped to pick up the rein that he had let go as his feet touched the ground. For the first time, his face was turned towards Bendigo Bill; but that worthy crouched behind a bush, and was unseen.

With much composure, Lord Ulswater got the terrified horse, shaking in every limb, and completely sobered by the shock, upon its feet, and examined its legs, which proved to be uninjured by the loose stones. He patted its neck kindly enough. "Poor fellow, you have got the worst of it!" he said in his slow, scornful way; and then, after waiting for a minute to allow the now submissive creature to recover its breath, he drew the bridle over his arm, and prepared to lead it homewards; but in this he was rudely interrupted.

Bendigo Bill, from his lurking-place behind the bush, had watched, with interest not quite devoid of a reluctant admiration, the issue of the contest between horse and rider. But when Lord Ulswater, unhurt in body, unshaken in

nerve, unruffled in temper, had patted the foam-spotted neck of his four-footed servant standing beside him panting and submissive, something in his gesture recalled to the tenacious memory of the eye-witness that night of humiliation when the champion of the East London roughs had been ignominiously defeated by a swell. There stood that very swell, smiling, calm, indomitable—Apollo condescending to disguise his glorious limbs in the ugly attire of a gentleman of the nineteenth century. It was too much for a garotter's flesh and blood to bear.

Hastily, the scowling scoundrel thrust his hand into the right-hand pocket of his dingy flannel coat. "All right," he muttered; "the old 'protectioner' is here." Mr. William Huller's protectioner was a short but heavy mace, devised for the cracking of skulls, and more anciently styled a life-preserver. It was a formidable weapon of its class, with a supple stem or handle of twisted whalebones, a weighty ball of lead at each end, and a leathern thong and loop. Grasping this murderous implement in his strong hand, Bendigo Bill crept softly on to within springing-distance, and then, with a bound that

brought him to the side of his intended victim, delivered not one, but two, of such hard and spiteful strokes as no Aryan head could have sustained without fracture of the brain-pau. There was something sickening in the sound of those heavy crashing blows, dealt as by a butcher's pole-axe.

But the strokes of the life-preserver, well meant as they were, did not alight on Lord Ulswater's head. A slight accidental movement saved him from the first blow, which dashed off his hat, and fell upon his shoulder. The second spent its force upon the arm that was suddenly lifted to ward it off. Even thus endured the blows of that pliant weapon were violent enough to warrant the confidence with which Bendigo Bill closed in, grasped Lord Ulswater by the collar and by the throat, and strove to bring him to the ground. It was a fatal mistake.

The garotter had an artless contempt, very usual with men of his order, for the prowess of gentlefolks. Those whose fortune had assigned them to the purple-and-fine-linen category, were, as he knew, softer of skin, and less familiar with hardship than himself—*argal*, they were easily

to be worsted. Granting, for the sake of argument, that a swell might be so far educated in fistic science as to protect himself, the younger Huller was yet assured that in a rough-and-tumble wrestling-match the swell must succumb. He himself had experience to appeal to. Enthusiastic critics in Australia had declared that Bendigo Bill's hug was as the hug of a bear. Perhaps it was so ; but to what could be likened the slow, pliant, resistless pressure of those arms that were now thrown around the robber's sturdy frame? Surely, to nothing so much as the gradual tightening and closing of the striped folds of some huge serpent, python or boa, enfolding its prey. Bendigo Bill struggled hard : rage, and shame, and fear, all lent him force ; but his breath was going fast, his arms were pinioned to his sides, and still that terrible grasp tightened, till it seemed as if ribs and breast-bone must be crushed together. He looked up.

He looked up, and then, for the first time, fear came upon him. He was a bold man, this Bendigo Bill, and had fought and murdered when his blood was up. Very ugly customers, to use his own phrase, had he gained the mastery

over; and very grim visages, black and white, had glared and grinned close to his in the grapple for life or death. But he had never thus been pinned, suffocated, compressed as by some irresistible force, and yet looked up into a face such as was smiling down upon him, now. No pity, no anger in those bright eyes of his antagonist; no frown on that broad white brow; and the firm, clean-cut lips were as fixed as if they had been of marble. Even then, when his own hot face was livid and purple, and his mouth gaped for the air that his labouring lungs could not supply, even then, Bendigo Bill could take speedy, terrible note, to wonder that Lord Ulswater's breath came as regularly as ever, that the colour in his cheek was scarcely deepened, and that he seemed able to crush his enemy, body and bones, upon his own breast, as if that breast had been an iron anvil. The powerful arms tightened their hold.

The torture was too much for Bendigo Bill. Black in the face, gurgling, weak as a child, he feebly gasped out the words: "Mercy! For God's sake, spare——" Then he seemed to faint, as he had fainted in Bermuda, when he

had tried to escape by swimming, and the boat picked him up, dead-beat, with the shark's back-fin waving close behind. He recovered to find himself prostrate in the roadway, with Lord Ulswater's knee upon his chest, and his own leaded mace in Lord Ulswater's hand.

"Now, my man, do you wish to say anything; because if you do, you had better be quick about it," said the victor, poising the heavy weapon aloft: "I am thinking of putting a stop to your professional avocations, once and for all."

Almost incredulous, the man looked up in his conqueror's face, and shuddered as he looked. Those cold, cruel blue eyes, that smooth forehead, that dreadful smile, made the strong, rude man's blood run as cold as the contact of a spectral hand could have done. Could his enemy really mean it—to kill him, smiling, calm, with the quiet deliberation of some cool fiend—to kill him? Why, my Lord Judge, with scarlet and ermine, would not do that. Three years' penal servitude—or five, as an old hand, perhaps—Mercy! he does mean it! All the ex-convict's doubts gave way as he saw the dangerous glitter of those eyes, now darkening from blue

almost to black, and the shadow that crept like a cloud over the fair broad brow. The mace was uplifted.

“I’ll die game!” He groaned out the words rather than spoke them, as he thought the thought. They seemed the parting requiem of Bendigo Bill. He was a British bull-dog of the true tough breed, though his unlucky steps had wandered in paths of crime since he was an urchin, and learned to be a thief. He made up his mind to die.

“I’ll die game!” the miserable boast of many a felon, of many a murderer, striving hard to repress a shudder as he felt the loathed touch of the hangman adjusting the cord about his neck! It was the only appropriate death-song that suggested itself, at the supreme moment, to a swan of so black a feather as Bendigo Bill. If a black Mayal in the bush had brained him with a war-club, he would not have minded that so very much. Had some ruffianly companion “knifed” him in a drunken scuffle, he could have accepted such an end with some philosophy. To be hanged, would not have seemed otherwise than as a run of unmitigated ill-luck, such as fell

to the lot of few of the Ishmaelites of society. But to be knocked on the head, like a calf in the shambles, in cool, premeditated fashion, such a fate was less supportable, and what made it seem the more ghastly and unnatural was, that the executioner, self-appointed, should be a gentleman. Bill could not make it out. Gentlemen, so he believed, were but a mealy-mouthed and white-livered race, slow to shed blood, easily deceived. They had scruples as to the summary chastisement of his pals and himself, scruples which he despised while he profited by them. For every deserved conviction, he had had a half-dozen of undeserved acquittals. When he had been at the bar of justice, it had seemed the first object of every one, magistrates, lawyers, judge, and jury, of all but the abhorred police, to give the prisoner the benefit of a doubt, and discharge him. But here was a swell who had conquered him, and was about to kill him, as he had killed others, far off among the gum-trees and tea-scrub, under the Southern Cross.

The thing could be safely done, too; the garotter knew that well. He was a man of known bad character. There were warrants out

to apprehend him. Robbery with violence was his trade, notoriously. He had attacked Lord Ulswater, and if he were to receive his death-wound in the affray, the coroner's inquest would return a verdict of justifiable homicide, and the newspapers would laud the slayer's gallant conduct to the skies. Bendigo Bill's manes would be unappeased by any legal consequences. He groaned, as he saw the trap into which he had thrust himself, closed his eyes, and awaited the final blow.

"Get up, man!" It was his captor's voice that bade him rise; and the pressure of his captor's knee upon his gasping chest was abruptly removed. "Get up, I say. I am not going to do you any harm," repeated Lord Ulswater, stirring the prostrate figure with his foot. Incredulous, sullen, but by no means inclined to renew the fight, the beaten man arose. He stole a sidelong glance at the victor's face, and saw that the dark shadow had passed away from it, and that Lord Ulswater was eyeing him with rather an amused look of recognition.

"You and I have met before," said John Carnac, in the easy, almost playful tone which

was more familiar to his friends' ears than any other: "in Great Popplewell Street, was it not?—I see by your ingenuous face, my friend, that I am not mistaken. I have a remarkably good memory for a face I have seen before, a gift for which *you* should be grateful, for it has saved your life. I care no more for shortening the existence of a man of your class than for crushing a black-beetle, but I remembered you, and spared you on that account. Can you guess why?"

No; Bendigo Bill could not guess why. At least, so monstrous did the hypothesis, that he had been spared on account of his former assault upon Lord Ulswater, appear to him that he could only hang his head, and shift his feet uneasily, without speaking. Lord Ulswater laughed. He had a curious silent laugh, that he seemed very much to enjoy, but which created no contagion of merriment in others. "You cannot guess," he said quietly. "Then I will give you the answer to the puzzle. At first, I took you for a common robber, with no higher motive than to get hold of my watch and the few pounds in my purse; and it was not

until I knew you, and felt sure that you owed me a grudge, and had done your best to repay me for the knock-down blow in Great Popplewell Street, that I resolved not to send you to your master, St. Nicholas, before your time.—No; I read your thoughts; but you are mistaken. I am not going to hand you over to the police—nothing of the sort. A fellow who is capable of revenge, must have some feelings in him beyond the mere mercenary wish to clutch a handful of money, and so—Mr.—Mr.—What's your name?"

"Hull—that's to say—leastways, they calls me Bendigo Bill!" returned that bewildered person.

"An alliterative name. It shows you to be a man who has travelled, too," said Lord Ulswater in his strange half-jesting way. "Well, Mr. Bendigo Bill, I forgive you—go in peace. And as introductions should be mutual, I'll give you my name. I am Lord Ulswater, and a county magistrate; and I live at St. Pagans, three miles from here. I mention this, in case you should not be aware of the fact, and also because, in your own interest, I advise you, as

a friend, not to try my patience by a third attempt to dash my brains out.—Now, good-bye to you.”

The face of Bendigo Bill, just then, would have been a study by which Lavater might have profited : wonder, incredulity, joy, struggled oddly with other unaccustomed feelings. His rage was quite dead within him. As for the shame of defeat, he felt it no more than an ordinary Roman gladiator would have done at being thrashed by some disguised demigod, Hercules or Pollux. It was no disgrace to be beaten by such an antagonist as that, who seemed more than man. But that was not all. The outcast had been so little used to the mercy of conscious strength, so used to associate clemency with weakness, that it was not till Lord Ulswater turned to go that tears—real tears—rose to the eyes of Bendigo Bill. To be grateful, was a new sentiment to the poor fellow. His voice was almost choked as he hoarsely swore a great oath never, as long as he lived, to lay a finger on Lord Ulswater again ; and more, to be that nobleman’s servant to command, to the last drop of his blood ; and serve him truly in any-

thing—"Like your dog, my lord, if so be you'd please trust me," he said earnestly.

John Carnac was a good judge of the sincerity of others. He took a steady look at the working of the man's rugged face, and laid his gloved hand on the shoulder of his new vassal, who was as eager to swear allegiance as he had lately been to do murder.

"I take you at your word, my man," he said kindly enough: "you may help me one day, who knows? I believe you mean what you say. Are you staying at Shellton for some time?—You nod. Very good. I shall see you again. Are you in any distress for money?"

"No, I'm not, sir—my lord—not just now," answered Bendigo Bill, in a burst of candour, and then added: "And my name's William Huller, and I'm known at the sign of the *Fishermen*, if wanted—so there!"

The magnanimous, perhaps self-sacrificing completeness of this avowal was heightened by the evident effort which the speaker made to blurt it out in a breath, lest he should change his mind, and vitiate the confession by a lie.

Lord Ulswater laughed again. "I rather like

you, my man," he said pleasantly. "I certainly must see you again. You have no sermons to fear from me; and I might be of use to you, and you to me. This little toy I return to you. Don't be too free in its employment. It is like an edge-tool—apt to hurt the owner." And as he spoke he gave back the captured life-preserver.—"So, now catch my horse." The horse was grazing quietly at half-a-dozen yards away, and was easily caught; and Bendigo Bill held Lord Ulswater's stirrup as he mounted, as officiously loyal in his service as any groom could have been. That crowning act of restoring the leaded "protectioner," with the confidence and the fearlessness that it implied, had quite won Bill's heart. "He trusted me," the man said to himself twice over, long after Lord Ulswater had unconcernedly ridden off, and after he had watched the horseman's gallant figure disappear amid the overhanging banks of the deep lane. "He trusted me," and with another oath, horrible in its terms, but not unchivalrous in the spirit that prompted it, to be true to his new patron, so singularly acquired, Bendigo Bill trudged back to Shellton-on-Sea.

The new patron was quite right in his estimate of the ex-convict's character. John Carnac rarely made a blunder in his judgments on the nature of those around him. He had been a born chief of men or boys, somehow, and had shown his appreciation of other people's qualities, ever since he was at once captain of the eleven and captain of the boats at school. Huller *fil's* was not altogether bad; he was not by any means so incurable a case as his quasi-respectable father. He had in him the stuff of a good grenadier, of a sturdy sailor, of a policeman who should have been valued as the apple of his inspector's eye. The wild dingo that rends and gnaws live mutton at the colonist's expense might be converted, in the course of a generation's domesticity, into a decent sheep-dog. There was much of waste power in Bendigo Bill, now fervent in his new faith as a pardoned rebel, who almost worships the exceptionally generous sovereign to whom he owes life and land, royally spared, with the sunshine of a king's kindness to add grace to the boon. Lord Uls-water had gained a willing slave.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUTH GIVES ADVICE.

“COME home—come home—come home!” Of how many letters written on paper or papyrus, scratched with steel stylets upon tablets of wax, painted with a flowing brush by scholarly Chinese clerks, hieroglyphed by dark-browed priests of Isis, have those urgent words formed the burden! Many an old crusader, panting in his sultry camp among the hot ravines of Palestine, has listened while some monk or mass-priest read out, in nasal sing-song tones, the contents of a letter in queer French or queerer Latin, calling upon the good lord to come home before his lands should be quite laid waste, his wife quite have forgotten him, and his vassals be quite beggared by the encroachments of greedy neighbour and needy king. To-day, to-morrow,

the same summons will be flashed along the telegraph wires, bidding laggards to come home lest worst betide; and the second column of the *Times* will adjure the lurkers within the Cave of Adullam to return, and let bygones be bygones.

In this strain it was that Ruth Morgan wrote to her brother, now making great progress in his parliamentary campaign. Letter after letter did she pen, begging and praying him to come back. It was not, she said, that any object of his could be devoid of interest to her; but though she entered keenly into all his hopes with regard to public life, there were other things at stake more important still. Why not, since matters were going so pleasantly in Oakshire, why not leave the affair in the hands of Mr. Sharples the agent, and come back to Shellton and Flora Hastings? It would be better—indeed, it would. Ruth had nothing to say against dear Flora—but—but why did not William leave the electioneering tactics to the practised skill of Mr. Sharples, and come back to look after his own?

There was, however, one fatal disadvantage

under which Ruth Morgan laboured in this well-meant effort to call back her brother to the side of his betrothed. She could not bring herself to accuse Miss Hastings of levity, or of fickleness ; and something seemed to warn her against the mention of Lord Ulswater's name. To occasion a possible quarrel between her brother and Flora, to give Flora, when she should be his wife, cause to hate her — these were contingencies from which Ruth shrank as she would have shrunk from deadly sin. It would break her heart, she felt, were her brother to become estranged from her—the last living thing she had to love in the world. And she was wise enough to know how very difficult it is for a brother's kindly feelings to remain unaltered towards a sister whom his wife dislikes. She could not bear to run such a risk as that. It was the one spark of selfishness she had left in her, poor girl, tried and tested as she had been in the fire of life-long suffering, but to make an enemy of William's wife was more than she could venture to do, even for William's sake.

She knew her brother—did Ruth Morgan, and understood his character in that tacit way

in which we see without owning it, the faults and foibles of those who are very dear to us. He was fond of his invalid sister, but very much of this fondness was due to habit. William Morgan's was not a nature in which family affections could take deep root. Her influence would be but a feather-weight in the balance, should Flora be her foe; and to do Ruth simple justice, she would not, had that influence been tenfold, have exerted it at the peril of bringing disunion into her brother's household. To charge Flora with unfaithfulness, was too stern a duty for Ruth not to shirk it as long as evasion was possible.

And was it a duty at all, the little casuist pleaded to herself in the long wakeful hours of the night? Perhaps not; indeed, certainly not, for was there not the probability of an error in judgment on her part, and had she not done Miss Hastings, and Lord Ulswater also, for the matter of that, grievous wrong by her over-ready suspicions? Nothing was more likely. Was it a sin for a high-spirited girl like Flora to take pleasure in the conversation of so accomplished a man as Lord Ulswater. Ought she to be ex-

pected to mope like a caged bird robbed of its mate, or to immure herself like a nun, because William Morgan chose to canvass Oakshire? If her visits to the abbey were neither very many nor very long, was it just to blame her for not caring to pass long afternoons in the society of a sickly crooked thing like her poor stupid self, and a prim, proud old dame like dear, kind, quaint Lady Harriet? Ruth was quite angry with herself for expecting any more attention from her lovely neighbour than that lovely neighbour thought it proper to bestow.

So Ruth Morgan in her voluminous but somewhat one-sided correspondence with her busy brother, was forced to appear in the false light of a feminine busybody, who made a fuss for no good reason, and who was importunate without showing cause for such importunity. And, indeed, it is doubtful if William Morgan ever read the crossings of her letters, or did more than skim hurriedly over the salient features of each successive epistle. As for coming back to Shellton just then, that was absurd, as anybody with the commonest knowledge of the world — anybody, indeed, but poor

Ruth, must have known. It was the crisis of the election.

For the member for Oakshire was dead. Poor Colonel Seymour, who had long lain in desperate case on his sick-bed at one of the spas in Germany, was dead at last, and those who had waited for some impatient weeks for the reversion of the colonel's shoes, politically speaking, were now jostling and battling to win the widowed constituency of the shire. The Conflagrative Club had suddenly sent down their best man, well supplied with professional assistance, and had tried to carry the county with a rush.

The short notes which Ruth received from her brother were very hopeful in their spirit. He had been first in the field; he had taken pledges of support from crowds of influential electors. Overflowing audiences in all sorts of halls and assembly-rooms had cheered him, and waved handkerchiefs at him, and shaken hands with him till his right arm ached under the infliction. Privately and publicly, his backers were confident of success. Sharples, his man, was twice as good and safe a Mephistopheles as

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the Conflagrative agent, who had already fallen into one or two pitfalls of his opponent's digging. The duke's influence was on the other side, of course, but the duke had been so ill-advised as to issue a high-handed ukase to his tenantry, pretty bluntly bidding them choose between their farms and their consciences; and all the papers were hard at work in fitting a well-deserved fool's cap upon his grace's head, for such unpardonable want of tact. Morgan must win; so every dead-wall in Oakshire declared in giant capitals, and the voices of the living took up the cry.

There is a hackneyed French proverb which declares that the lucky at play will be unlucky in love, and *vice versâ*. Perhaps it is scarcely possible to give full attention to two such incongruous pursuits at one time; but, at any rate, in whatever peril of shipwreck might be Fortunatus Morgan's prospects of matrimonial felicity, he was on the high tide of political prosperity. The Right Honourable Robert rubbed his sleek white palms together with dry official gleefulness as he heard of and from his son-in-law to be. Mrs. Hastings was pleased too. It would look

so much better in that column of fashionable intelligence where "marriages in high-life" find a niche, the announcement of the nuptials of her daughter with William Morgan, Esq., M.P. for Oakshire, and a Lord of the Treasury, than if there were no tag to the bridegroom's name other than his territorial possessions in England and Wales.

The writ was to be issued on such a day, the nomination to take place on such another, and then came the poll and the tug of war. But Fortunatus was quite sure that he could get through the ceremony, the chairing, and speech-making and nonsense, and be back at Shellton in time for the great picnic, so called, at St. Pagans on the 4th. That was reckoned as an engagement.

For this nominal picnic, an unwonted amount of company had been invited to spend a few days at the abbey. Lady Harriet, wishing to please her nephew, but groaning over every note she penned in her stiff, neat handwriting, had asked two or three families that were known to possess agreeable daughters, by way of enlivening the dull old pile during the short stay of the

guests who came at Lord Ulswater's invitation, and who were rare birds worth the catching.

Some half-dozen of London men, and no more, had Lord Ulswater asked to his house, but these were the very chiefest dandies of Dandydom, the sublimated cream of society. Some were of the Eleusis Club, but not all. The Eleusinians were Lord Wyatt, Tregooze, and Chirper of the Life Guards. The outsiders of that jealously guarded institution were men of great social note—Gunnesley Fitzgeorge; Lord Macdirk, Lord Kilsporrán's eldest son; and Sir Harry Bletchley, who was so rich that he required auditors and actuaries to examine the accounts of the land-stewards and agents for his vast Yorkshire estates; even as did that Oakshire duke against whom Fortunatus Morgan was doing fierce battle.

To have secured the presence of these young men, was no trifling triumph. Few, indeed, were the mansions (especially just then, at the finish of the London season, when even the best trained of fashionable hacks are disposed to kick at the restraints of the polite world, and run riot on the moors or on the Alps) where these

exceptional prize-flowers of Mayfair would have been beguiled to visit. They knew their value, did Chirper, and Sir Harry, and Fitzgeorge, and had no desire to make themselves cheap by indiscriminate acceptance of hospitality. There were not, as most of them said with perfect truth, ten country-houses in Britain where any one of them would have gone just then; or half-a-dozen men who could have got them down to a glum old jail on a cliff, to be caged with a fossil old maid of quality, and a poor dying girl, with a crooked spine and without a grandfather, whose wistful face made a fellow disagreeably thoughtful. But John Carnac, rich or poor, was one of those half-dozen men; they could not refuse him.

The dovecots of Shellton Manor were fluttered by the arrival or expectation of these very fine birds, these fancy-pigeons of a dainty breed, at St. Pagans. Crashaw and others, his chums, grew a little nervous and doubtful of retaining their influence over young Warburton and the like, as well as of their own standing in the eyes of the unsophisticated young ladies from remote counties; for swells differ as much as diamonds

do, and some are sure to outsparkle others. It seems hard, at first sight, to say why Crashaw of the Blues should feel as if he had lost four inches of his stature, as if his whiskers and tawny moustaches were getting limp, and his shoulders round, and his boots dim, at the prospect of meeting that other carpet-knight, Chirper of the Life Guards.

Crashaw was a fine-looking, honourable fellow, of an old stock, and respected in his regiment; but he could not swim in such waters as those in which Chirper, superb golden-mailed fish of the newest fashion, deigned to agitate his amber fins, and bask, aureous, in the sun. Chirper was very handsome, and great ladies petted him, and he was to be a lord, and would have as much of an ancient estate as the Jews could spare him.

But Captain Crashaw knew very well that it was not because Lieutenant Chirper was heir to the barony of Torporley, or on account of his dark eyes and ambrosial curls, or stag-like head, or the delicacy of his hands and feet, remarkable in a man of his inches, or even because he would perhaps save three or four thousand a year out

of the fire of usurious interest, that Chirper was to him as Lombard Street to a China orange. Had that fascinating youth been as ugly as sin, and as poor as Job, and with no more connection with the British or any other aristocracy than Georges Dandin had, he would still have been of a higher water than Crashaw, flattening his nose against the bay-windows of choicer clubs—welcome at more palatial dwellings. There is no certain footrule whereby to measure the social rank of men and women; and Crashaw knew well enough that even if old Sir Marmaduke and his sons should die, and the baronetcy, and the Hall, and all the Northamptonshire property devolve upon his own insolvent head, he must still be content all his life long to play second-fiddle to Chirper.

“Why on earth has John asked these people? What am I to do with them? How am I to amuse them?” Lady Harriet asked, very ruefully, five or six times over, of her visitor Ruth. The old lady went about on hospitable thoughts intent, wrinkling and knitting her brows over the necessary preparations for receiving such guests in that neglected house, whose cold

hearths were all unused to be surrounded by company. For all that, Lady Harriet was proud, in her secret heart, to entertain such pilgrims—pilgrims whose sandals were sure to be of the newest mode, and their staves of exquisite workmanship, and their wallets dainty toys, and the gourds at their sides gold-stoppered essence-flasks, redolent of the freshest perfume from Paris, and the very scallop-shell in their hats a jewel of price. The fashionable intelligencers of the press would chronicle the names of the distinguished sojourners at St. Pagans, and many of Lady Harriet's old friends would read and envy. There was balm in that idea, for much trouble and pain.

Meanwhile, although Lord Ulswater merely laughed when his aunt tried to consult him on the subject of her domestic difficulties, and carelessly rejoined that his friends must rough it, and that it would do Chirper and Macdirk good to mortify their flesh on a plain British diet, either he was better than his word, or some fairy watched over the credit of the mansion; for temporary servants, new furniture, carriages and horses, wine, hothouse flowers, and a portable

conservatory to put them in, decorators, and all sorts of cunning artists, glided into the abbey day by day, and did wonders for its embellishment. Presently, there came pale, resolute gentlemen, who wore earrings, and spoke broken English, and anon appeared in flat cooks' caps and uniforms of white linen, and took the kitchens by storm. The preparations for the picnic went steadily on, and still Ruth Morgan's letters to her brother were filled with the same cry—"Come back, come back!"

• END OF VOL. I.



